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SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

A Story.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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TO

MY DEAR BROTHER,

THOMAS C. FITZGERALD,

FANE VALLEY.

ADVERTISEMENT.

LEST the reader should suppose that the author was "trading," as the phrase goes, on the indulgent reception of a former work, he thinks it right to state that neither "Jenny Bell," nor the present story, was meant to be a "sequel" to "Bella Donna." All three make up one story—deliberately planned at the outset, and thus subdivided for the sake of convenience.

CONTENTS.

BOOK THE FIRST.

SIR JOHN DIGBY.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—DIGBY	1
II.—DIGBY AND ITS GUESTS	12
III.—THE VALLEY	38
IV.—THE NEW ARRIVALS	51
V.—“LORD JOHN”	73
VI.—IN THE LIBRARY—“THE SHORT WAY”	79
VII.—LORD JOHN AND MRS. LEPELL	93
VIII.—THE DRIVE	101
IX.—PLANS FOR THE NIGHT	119
X.—THE DINNER PARTY	135
XI.—THE CHARADES	149
XII.—FRESH ARRIVALS	178
XIII.—THE NEW GUESTS	204
XIV.—A LONG DAY	218
XV.—AN EXPLOSION	226
XVI.—BREAK UP	240
XVII.—SIR JOHN GOES HOME	268

BOOK THE FIRST.

SIR JOHN DIGBY.

SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

CHAPTER I.

DIGBY.

IT was now a gray evening, when a day in a Christmas week was all but done, when the air was fresh and cool, and of that pleasant tone which seems almost the colour of aluminium—the most delightful hour in the day for brisk walking—when, too, there was a little stiff film of frost rather than snow on all things, a crackling under foot, faint edging, and the finest lines of white, tipping every branch, with an exquisite delicacy that no human touch could ever hope to imitate; and when the plantations, stripped of every leaf, standing out on the white background, seemed to be distant shipping

with masts and dark net-work of fine rigging, lying up in great docks. Sometimes a faint breath of air came, and a light shower of white snow floated down leisurely and softly. The pond near the mill, partly frozen, looked like a sheet of cold, polished black marble. Already on the hill side, was a light or two twinkling; and on what was called in summer "the green lane," the wheels of the doctor's gig were clattering afar off as if on a causeway of steel.

About an hour before, the guns had been heard in the plantation. Hodge and his friend sauntering home beside the heavy cart—a two-horse cart in tandem fashion—had said to each other that "they were shootin' up i' the Bigger"—meaning a pet and costly plantation where pheasants lived crowded together rather too closely for comfort. The Bigger was certainly some three or four miles from "th' 'Ouse," as the chief mansion of the district was called, and between it the country eddied up and down a good deal—up, to the swelling hill, the top of which was capped by a sort of dark plantation,

but looked like a fortress, it was so straightly enclosed with a stone wall; and down again into the open valley and the brook, now caught in the cold gripe of the frost and kept prisoner. The gentlemen from "th' 'Ouse" were seen afar off (by another Hodge with *his* cart) coming down slowly, a little scattered—some four or five—a couple of keepers with guns and dogs, and behind all some half a dozen serfs or beaters, who had run the risk of their lives several times in that day from the guns of a raw and agitated young sportsman. Above all there was a large bag; for many a noble bird—black, rich, and solid of plumage, had come *staggering* down heavily; who as he lay plunging and dying on the ground, fixed on his destroyers a glowing, glittering eye as bright certainly as many a human eye.

Two of the gentlemen were walking together in front. They were the freshest of the party. They were talking eagerly. The one who spoke most was a young man of about twenty, with a very Italian face, with black hair and moustache,

and a handsome, olive-toned face. His friend was a very strong and robustly-made man, good looking from mere excess of health. He was about five-and-twenty. "We have done very well for Sir John's birds, at least for one day," said the dark young man. "I really enjoy it. I feel happy—ready to set off, and run, and shout."

The other was lighting a cigar in a very ponderous and leisurely way—a plain, satisfactory man, of little speech, who helped on a talk by the lever of a word or two, that somehow was as useful as a sentence.

"Wish I could feel like that," he said.

"So you do, Selby," said the young man, "and so you can; so can anyone. It is as easy to be happy as miserable. Charming world—delicious world. It seems to me there is nothing but love, money, health, books, travels, enjoyment—in too much abundance."

The other nodded.

"Right enough," he said.

"And do you know this—what do you make of

the shabby scoundrels that abuse it, that talk of it as a hollow world, and a cold world, and empty world?"

"Apples of the Dead Sea, eh?" said Selby, with a cough.

"No ridicule, sir, of my Great Thinker," the young man said, half seriously. "There are good apples, too. Cold, hollow, and empty! Why, I say it is warm, round, and full—O *so* full—*too* full."

"Regular Epicurean, I declare, Severne," said his friend.

"I am, I boast. I have never had an hour's trouble in my life; and I assure you a great deal of that is from a *purpose not* to let myself be put out in any way. I began that at school, my dear fellow, and never had a day's trouble. What was the result? My school-days were the happiest in the world; and I go back there, and shall go back there every year of my life. When we meet each other we have plays and games, and are boys again."

"All right," said the other; "quite right."

"To be sure it's all right," said young Severne. "I have been happy ever since, too; and by Jove

on high, I am so happy to-night—hang all bashfulness and shyness. You know me like a book, Selby—you do."

"Well, I know about *that*," said Selby. "Palmers coming—aren't they?"

"They are," said the young man; "that is, Alice Palmer; for her mother, to tell you the truth, depresses me—that air of 'seen better days,' you know. Someway when people *have* seen better days, I always get impatient. Why couldn't they keep them?"

"*You'll* have better days in plenty and keep them too. That's the thing," said the other. "When are they due?"

"For dinner, they said," answered Severne. "Don't you think they'll come?"

"Well, I suppose they will," said the other; "people always like to be in for dinner. Come from Boulogné, don't they, all the way?" he asked.

"To be sure they do," answered the other, warmly. "And look here, Selby, you stout fossil of a bachelor—you don't know what may come of all this."

“I don’t know, indeed,” said the other; “on my soul I don’t.”

“No you don’t,” said the other, gaily; “how should you? *You* were never struck down in a raging French town by a sun-stroke, and picked up and carried into an English house, to be nursed for six weeks by as charming a blossom, as divine an angel, as ever got furlough from Heaven’s chancery.”

“Ah, this is Keats and Tennyson line,”—said his friend.

“I want to be happy, you know. Every fellow that wants to be happy should marry young. My father married young; so did *his* father; so did *his*—”

“But what will mamma say, my dear fellow? she means you to be a Cabinet Minister, Governor-General of India. You *know* she does.”

“Pooh! my dear clear-eyed friend. Don’t you know that what I like is what *she* likes? That I am a joss or an idol for her; that if she was asked for a joint of every limb to secure me

an additional week's life she would give it?—I am safe *there*, my dear friend."

"Glad of it," said his friend, "I *am* rather stupid. Hallo, Peters, you went near singeing me to-day. You really must take care. No gentleman can go out with you with comfort to his life. You sent all the blood to my face."

This was addressed to a very tall and limp youth, who, however deficient in some portions of the pastime, was certainly scrupulously correct in costume, or in all points that might be regarded as the *materiel* of shooting. If knicker-bockers and heather mixture stockings, and straps and pouches, and boxes, could make a man shoot, he was an admirable shot indeed. His name was Peters.

"I didn't know you were so near," said Peters, screwing his glass into his eye, to look at his piece, "and these Le Faucher guns——"

"Now don't lay it upon the poor gun," said a strong thick-set well-knit officer, who came walking up quickly. "I say, just see the way he is looking at it, as if it was a mad dog or a

restive horse. They're good guns enough, though they *are* made by a Frenchman; but the old English rifle for me. I tell you, you were near making potted ham of me at the corner of that hedge. I give you my honour I heard the shot in the bushes. Look here, Mr. Peters, either you or I stay at home to-morrow."

"Philips, now let Peters alone," said young Severne, good-humouredly, "recollect we all had to begin."

"Then I wish he'd begin with some one else but me. It's no joke at all. I was as near being missing for Mrs. Philips and the children, about 3 P.M., this day, as ever I was."

Captain Philips, quartered not far off, with Mrs. Philips and the children, was a specimen of the *comfortable married officer*—a race that cared more for comforts than for amusements, and are to the mass of officers what a country gentleman is to ordinary young men. He therefore vigorously resented this "attempt on his life," as he always would call it (alluding to it afterwards in the smoking-room), making a sort of grievance.

“He should get himself taught, just as we send men into the school to ride. You know a fellar of that sort is a public enemy. Why, what would my insurance agent say to me if I was to tell him I habitually went out with an unskilful fellar of that sort? It would vitiate the policy on the spot. I vow to you, Miss Fenton, here was I at the turn of the road just where I made Wilkins put me; and I heard the bird coming on through the wood, and would have nailed him as he came out, when there came a whisking sound in the bushes, not a yard from my elbow. I declare it gave me a turn. If the man had fired at me directly, I don’t think he’d have gone nearer, or perhaps so near—ha, ha! But it won’t do, you know. Not at all.”

Now they were passing through swinging gates, getting into paddocks and farmyards, and still greater courts, where there were the offices, and forges, and stabling, and a sort of little domestic town, with a tall tower, in the middle of which the pigeons and a great clock were tenants in common. This was towards the back of Digby;

and by the old clock, whose striking was a little interfered with by the fluttering of the pigeons, it was past six o'clock. Then they were presently going along the whitewashed, almost subterranean passages—for Digby was a great establishment—to the gamekeepers' room, where they gave up their guns.

“Now to dress,” said Severne, “and not much time either.” They turned out again into the open course round by the front of the house. It was a shorter and more agreeable way to the rooms, and on the steps were met by the master of the house, Sir John Barton Digby, of Digby, as he used to sign himself, and as indeed he was set out in Sir Bernard’s excellent *Liber Aureus*; leaning, too, on the arm of his friend, the Dean of Bermondsey.

“Hallo!” cried the baronet. “How’s the shootin’ been? I hope you have sacked my birds? One bag? Ah! Bags—bags, sir, used to be the way; and bursting bags, too.”

CHAPTER II.

DIGBY AND ITS GUESTS.

DIGBY was rising over their heads as they stood on the steps, and quite overshadowed them. A kind of half Italian building, a square centre tower with an archway leading into a court, and two stone wings, ended by smaller square towers. From the centre rose two open cupolas or belfries, capped by great stone eagles. It was a fine building. Looking into "Dutton's County History," the reader will find a whole account of what Dutton calls "this spacious pile," with its date, circa Charles the Second, its architect, Vecchi, then held in much fashion and repute, and a very minute account of its labyrinths, gardens, ponds, statues, &c., laid out in the French manner, under the direction of Van Citters, pupil, it was said, of the famous Le Pôtre. In return

for this description of his house, the Digby of Dutton's day could not do less than take ten large paper copies of Dutton's work.

Already were the red curtains drawn across, and lamps lighted in all the bedrooms; and the dispensary doctor, whose horse's hoofs were chinking musically down the long bare avenue between the porches, might have comforted himself by fancying he was drawing near to a glowing fireplace, crossed by the mullions of the old windows as if they were bars.

The pleasant sight was in the square court, into which looked what was called the Long Room or Picture Gallery, which ran down a whole side. This was a sort of drawing-room, a little "draughty," perhaps, in these frosty times; but Sir John Digby insisted always on this tribute being paid to old customs, piled up a good fire with dried logs from his plantation, and gathered in his guests here for ten or twenty minutes or so before breakfast and dinner. The guests were now dropping in.

Captain Philips almost first down, and sitting

in a leather-backed arm-chair—well into the fire—alone, audibly objected to this arrangement.

“I don’t see the point of it,” he said, “forcing a lot of ladies and gentlemen into a great vault like this. It ain’t fair, you know. ‘Ten my word, if I get back my lumbago this winter, I know on whose shoulders to lay it. Ugh! Now that little snugger on the stairs is just the thing—just the thing. Why should we be getting cold in our joints—all from an old, absurd custom? Dinner seems later to-day, I think. How’s time, Dean?”

Dean Burnaby was entering, had come up gratefully to the fire, shivering a little, and then, as it were, opened out all his arms and large figure to take in all its warmth. He was a very gigantic, florid-faced dignitary, almost awkward and unwieldy from his size. It was pleasant to see him walking, rolling, and swinging along; and he was certainly the tallest ecclesiastic of his diocese.

“Well,” he said, “Captain Phillips, we are a little late. Our ladies are getting on their marriage garments—Ha—hem!” he added, breaking

into a soft smile, "I recollect so well at Cross Towers, the old lord, who always said whatever came into his head—a little coarse and strong, between you and me—but a good man, long gone to his account. 'Well,' he said, on a similar occasion, 'don't hurry the girls. You wouldn't have 'em come down—in their *smocks*?'" And the dean looked round cautiously, to be sure that no one was listening. (He had one long leg up on the hob.)

"Ah, Miss Fenton, *you* are in excellent time."

The two sisters came rustling in—gay, lively, "officer's girls"—excellent furniture for a country house,—with a cowed and helpless mamma. "Rattlers," some called them, and "good jolly girls;" and other critics—female chiefly—lifted up their eyes with a "Well, I suppose it is all right; it will come all right." They were thoroughly business-like, and were even careful as to the objects of their conversation; for words, we know, are sometimes as dear as gold and silver; and time, again, is

money; and many an opportunity is lost and wasted unprofitably, which might have brought all manner of blessings.

“We had a very pleasant day,” said the elder, Isabella, settling down her dress, and taking a twisted view down her back.

“Very pleasant, indeed. Mr. Canby rode over from Ripley, and we took him over the place, and—and do you know—such a funny thing,” interrupted her sister, “we got shut up in the tower; the old door got fixed in some way, and I assure you Mr. Canby with all his strength could not stir it.”

“You should have all tried together,” said the Dean. “Union, you know, is strength. You remember the story of the faggots—a man——”

“Oh, Isabella was on the other side of the door,” said her sister, laughing. “I and Mr. Canby had run on in front. She could not keep up with us.”

Here were more guests. Their cowed mamma—delicate and timid, “enjoying” wretched health; an agreeable and youngish barrister—

Vernon Jones—better known and in sharper practice at country houses than at Westminster ; a London doctor—"young Peters"—who had been so wild in his shooting in the morning ; Mr. Monkhouse, M.P., a tall, pink-coloured bachelor, with a large, rudely-cut nose, and the old "mutton-chop" whisker ; and Mrs. Severne, the mother of the young man who had been out shooting—a woman, graceful, elegant, and with this grown-up son, looking absolutely no more than five-and-thirty, with a small head and face exquisitely shaped, fair features, shaped like a cameo, and the full cheeks of a girl ; this was the well-known Mrs. Severne, who had been a sort of political beauty years ago, whose husband had been Secretary at War in a Cabinet of thirty years ago, and who, herself, was said to have "pulled the wires" in all sorts of combinations, and very many of those wires too. Last of all came in Sir John Digby himself, in a blue coat and gilt buttons, and an enormous white stock of the days of Lord Melbourne or Canning.

"Dinner, eh ! All right," he said. "Now,

Mrs. Severne—these Palmers will not be here to-night; omnibus has just come back from the station."

They went on in a long procession through the galleries, lit up here and there with a stray oil-lamp, but rather dark. As the way was long, they marched quickly.

"We are like a regiment going to a review," said Miss Fanny Fenton to Mr. Canby.

"By Jove, yes," said the gentleman. "Isn't it? Quick march! Left shoulders forward! Dress by your right there!" And the wit, throwing his hearer into convulsions, proceeded to work his joke all the way. Captain Philips had put the collar of his coat up about his neck as he went along.

"We'll have pains in our bones all next week for this," he said. "Hot air apparatus don't cost so much after all; and if people will ask people to these old-fashioned, rambling dens of discomfort, they should warm 'em up a bit. Why, there's Smith and Lankester, Soho, 'ill put you up the whole affair, pipes, biler" (so he pro-

nounced it), "hot wharter" (so he pronounced it), "lock, stock, and barrel complete, for, I suppose, one hundred and fifty. Ugh, there, it's down my back again."

This was all addressed to the timid mother of the Fentons, who agreed that Smith and Lankester, Soho, should have been called in.

When they were arranged on both sides of the long table in the large hall, and half of that room cut off by huge curtains, and two great fires roaring away like blast furnaces at each end, the Captain let down his collar, and said that this was "more Christian-like. Still," he added, settling his napkin, preparing his bread, glasses, &c., so as to be commodious and handy for the meal—"still, it's not the place for human beings to dine in. What's this?" he added, distrustfully, as two plates were held over his arm. "Clear soup—get me the clear. Take my advice, Mrs. Fenton—have clear soup. *His* cook can do that."

At the other end of the table was Sir John himself, with his leading guests about him—Mrs.

Severne, Dean Burnaby, and lower down, Severne, his friend Selby, and some "locals," as the young men called guests from the district—beings known by numbers merely in the rolls of social life, but to whom the young men were very attentive. Mrs. Severne's fine face, as seen illuminated by the soft lamplight, struck these honest rustics; and a stout young farming gentleman, in a torrent of enthusiasm, asked, "Who that lovely girl up yonder was?"

Sir John's voice was heard very often, and very loud, and his tall, thin figure gave him facilities for projecting it down the table.

"I don't know what it will come to," he said; "they may make ducks and drakes of the country if they like for what I care. There's no *principle* now in the Government. I declare to you, Dean, it's frightful—frightful. It keeps me awake in my bed. There's that man at the Exchequer—a fellow that I wouldn't trust to go in with a cheque to the next market—a fellow that, in a lower rank of life, I would take and

put on the wheel, and give seven years to over and over again."

"There is indeed a want of principle in our rulers of to-day," said Dean Burnaby, placidly, "and I recollect the present Lord Anglestre making a remark of the same sort in *his own library*, just standing before the fireplace;" and seeing a rustic lady greatly impressed by this last part, he added softly, "and on the rug."

"Oh, that's very well—very well," said Sir John, angrily. "Anglestre and his whole gang may talk that way, but it's their own infernal doing. It's got among them like a rot, sir. Liberal, indeed! *Liberal!* That's the name! I say it's low, mean, vulgar, crawling, and immoral. I call spades spades. It's a *disgrace* to these men—men of good blood—bowing down to take up low filthy blackguards, that you wouldn't ask into your house, or be seen speaking to!—Equality! Faugh! But wait, I say, until these creatures rise up and massacre us all."

Mrs. Severne now spoke in a wonderfully sweet voice.

“I hope we shall not live to see these horrors,” she said; “but I wish our people could get in. We are famishing in sight of meat and drink. I am praying and pining for it, for the most unselfish motives.”

“You may pray and pray, my good madam,” said he to her; “it will be no use. I say the country is going clean to pot. It’s all the fault of our men sitting down to dinner, talking with rascals that by-and-by will be taking my land and your land, and dividing it among ‘em. Some Manchester blackguard will be sitting here in this chair one of these days,” he added, excitedly.

The other laughed.

“It’s a very serious thing, sir,” said Sir John, with more feeling. “I suppose it will last out *my* day. But the poor old country, I am very sorry for it. I, sir, have seen the good old days when we were all gentlemen, and you sat down with gentlemen, and rascals were kept down well in their places. My goodness!—to think I should have lived into such times. But after that FATAL step of Peel’s in ‘29,” added the Baronet, drop-

ping his voice, "what could you expect? We are handed over, bound neck and crop, to—Rome." (This dreadful word the Baronet always pronounced in a low broken voice, as if it was spelt "Row-home.")

"The encroachments of that Power," said the Dean, "are certainly calculated to afford grave alarm. It was only last week that Sir Henry Plumer, who, as we all know, is a man of advanced liberal principles——"

"Liberal grandmother!" said the Baronet, really angry; "I am surprised at you, Dean. This man's a disgrace, a dishonour to his name. He's lost his caste. When I meet him I declare to heaven I'll cut him like this bit of salmon. Why, sir, if he was in India he might stick those hooks into his armpits, and be swung up, and it wouldn't give him back his caste. He's a dirty fellow, and I always said so. Mark my words, you'll hear of that man in—er—something with the police. I say nothing now."

He *had* said a good deal, but the Dean struck in, softly—

"I was a little surprised at the change in his opinions; but I suspect he is sorry now."

"Finds his fingers dirty, and wants to wash 'em," said the Baronet, contemptuously. "Let him, if he can."

"But when *are* we to be in?" said Mrs. Severne; "that is what I am dying to know."

"When we learn to behave as gentlemen and associate with gentlemen," said the baronet, "it'll come round by itself. That young fellow of yours, I am glad to see, he is a gentleman still. How long he may stay so, heaven knows."

"I have no fears about him," said Mrs. Severne. "My dear Sir John, we have an inducement to retain our principles, not given to all. Harold is to have a little office when we do come in."

"I have no doubt that but Mr. Harold Severne has a very brilliant career before him. Only last month the present Bishop of Leighton Buzzard—Brindley, you know, who was fellow and tutor of All Souls—spoke really in a very high manner of him."

“As for that, Dean,” said Mrs. Severne, smiling, “I don’t at all take it as a compliment. He’s a most singular genius, is Harold. Anything he chooses to turn his mind to, he can shine in. As for Double Firsts and Wranglers, I don’t mind that. There are hundreds of your dull men have done that sort of thing.”

“A mistake, my good lady,” said the Baronet; “look at Peel, before he fell; look at Eldon; look at Percival; look at Wellington—every man of ‘em—read their classics, and made their verses like gentlemen; and every one of ‘em wasn’t ashamed to take his glass of old wine. Now we must learn to speak Frog French and Dutch. And Castlereagh was the man. ‘D——n their lingo!’ said he once to old Sir Tatton, when he was going out to Vienna. ‘I’ll *make* ‘em understand *me*,’ and faith he did. But your Harold there—now that I think of it, I don’t quite know his principles—what he’s at. The young fellows of this day may be all Jesuits, for what I know.”

“He is rather reserved,” said Mrs. Severne, rather warmly; “even with me. Of course, I

know he'll go with anything his father thought right; but, as he says, very properly, he should like to study it, and make himself up in the matter before starting, and that seems only reasonable."

"Reasonable! I don't know that," said Sir John, with a growl. "Why shouldn't he know. I don't understand thinking and looking about one in such things. Suppose he comes next to make up his mind about our glorious religion, as by law established. Must we give him time for that?"

"God forbid!" said the Dean. "The extent to which those impious persons push their doubts is appalling, criticising the sacred——"

"They ought to get the cat's tail, and a warm scourging once a week; that would text them. But I tell you what, ma'am, there must be no mistake about our young friend. No milk and water here. None of your weak tipple of 'advanced' Conservatism and rubbish. He must be sound wind and limb, ma'am."

"The fly of the apothecary, Mrs. Severne,"

said the Dean, pleasantly ; "we know the results as regards the ointment. No, our young friend, so brilliant and clever beyond his years, has, I have reason to know, the soundest principles—the good stern old sense of *unflinching, uncom-promising duty.*"

"You should marry him, ma'am," said the Baronet ; "plant him firmly down in a sound family. You know what I mean."

"Not much money," said Mrs. Severne, smiling ; "but enormous influence, good name and connection."

"Influence is better than money," said the Dean, plaintively ; "for connection is as good as —let me see—say thousands a-year."

"To be sure it is," said the Baronet, in better humour. "We'll talk to him. Never fear ; he's a fine fellow ; we'll get him somebody —that is, if he is *sound*, you know."

"We have thought of all that, Sir John," said Mrs. Severne, confidentially. "You know the Lindens ? Well, a younger daughter—niece to the Buryshafts—they can do anything, you know."

Then the conversation went off on Lord Bury-shaft, who, the Baronet said, had the "true stuff" in him, and who the Dean pronounced to be "a truly apostolic man." "I never heard a layman read prayers like him. Such *soul* in his voice, you know. No wonder," added the Dean, looking round mysteriously; "they consider him in the Appointments. I met him once at Lord Henry's, and had a great deal of conversation with him. Oh! a great deal. Lord Henry said to me, as we went in to dinner, '*That* man is the *salt* of England.' I thought it a very happy expression."

Thus the dinner went on. Harold Severne got rather silent towards the end. He was disappointed, perhaps, that the expected guests had not come. There was, indeed, another train, towards eleven, and the omnibus was to go down again. It was a private station, literally forced on Sir John, to his infinite disgust. Every day that he heard the shriek of the passing train, he uttered a solemn malediction on the company.

"We are expecting some friends, Miss Fenton;

said Harold, in explanation; "all the way from France. I can assure you I should not be sitting here but for them—not that that concerns anyone beyond myself."

"Oh! and Mrs. Severne," said the junior Miss Fenton. "She would be *miserable* if anything happened to *you*, Mr. Severne." (This was said with an air of a complaint.)

Severne smiled over at his friend. "I think she *would* be a little distressed, Miss Fenton. But I do hope they will come to-night. Everyone in the house will like them, I know; and as for the daughter, Miss Palmer, every man here will be in love before morning."

Miss Fenton's ears seemed to quiver uneasily, as a dog's would at the sound of an approaching step.

"Oh! indeed," she said, drily, "a beauty coming here! This is a surprise. So the *regular* ladies of the house must prepare to be neglected and given up. Isn't it cruel, Mr. Canby?"

With the pitiless selfishness of ball-room

friendship, that gentleman showed an anxiety about the coming lady.

“ We all get our turn,” he said ; “ one day up, another down. Tell us about her, Severne.”

“ You will be one of the first victims, Mr. Canby,” said Miss Fenton, with some faint hope that she would be contradicted.

“ Depends,” he answered, carelessly ; “ we must see before we give in. What’s your friend like, Severne ? ”

“ Fancy,” said the other, with a little eagerness, “ only fancy this ! a girl *almost* tall, her head *laden* with heavy black hair, her face bright and all colour——”

“ All colour ! ” said Miss Fenton, with a “ giggle ” of derision, “ dear me ! ”

“ All colour,” repeated Harold, gravely, “ like an old picture. It is so rich and gorgeous, that it is like a feast—a bit of fruit—and taken with her wonderful eyes, large and deep, she lights up the room, and furnishes it with a feast of colour. Then she has a figure like a classic statue—quiet, yet at every movement falling into some

graceful attitude. She walks like a Cleopatra. It seemed to me, as I lay on the sofa in their house, even her dress made no rustle as she walked. Her touch was like velvet. She is my Paul Veronese, and until I saw her I did not believe that human colouring could come so near to the gorgeous colours of the brush. But you'll see her to-morrow, and be dazzled for yourselves."

"What a description!" said Miss Fenton. "What shall we do when this paragon comes? Has Mrs. Severne seen her?" she added, maliciously; for she had noticed that his mother, looking down, had caught some words of his rapturous declaration.

Of young Severne, both the Fentons knew they could have no reasonable hopes, and so could only look on him "as a brother."

"No," he said, quietly, "she has not. She was ill herself at the time, and she never knew anything until I was well. You will see her embrace her though for all that, and treat her *like a daughter*."

Again Miss Fenton simpered and "giggled."

"Like a daughter?" she said; "how funny!"

"It is funny," said Harold, laughing. "I beg pardon for being so old-fashioned. I am a poor young lad from Oxford, and the old childish simplicities are only partially knocked out of me. But never mind, my dear Miss Isabella; what does that fogie Shakspere say about 'making the body rich?' Mental qualifications will hardly do to set up a girl in life. But he spoke according to his lights. But now I give all the ladies here due notice, when she comes they will find it hard to hold their own. A wonderful girl, I can tell you. Not disputatious, you know, which is odious in a woman, but a quiet weight of manner, which will astonish you. I think it fair," he added, laughing, "to put you all on your guard. She will be a social queen here."

"And will you be her minister—he! he!—Mr. Severne?" simpered Miss Fenton, her mouth tightening a little with vexation.

"No," he said, seriously. "I fear she will not do that. The minister must be at least

equal to his queen. That post, Miss Fenton, is reserved for a cunning man—a genius, perhaps—a man that has seen the world, and knows it off by heart like his prayers; like Canby. Eh, Canby?"

That gentleman accepted the compliment in good faith. "No, 'pon my word—ah, you are joking," he said. "I shouldn't object though. Like to be councillor to any pretty girl, you know. Your description has made me rather curious." Here was social heartlessness again—signs of hollow infidelity, and Miss Fenton's lips tightened yet more.

Thus the dinner went on. Often Sir John came back to his hopeless despairing of the Republic, and through the pleasant clatter of voices was heard a snatch of his desponding vaticination.

"I'll soon have to be looking out for a decent corner to live in. As for old England, I give her up. I'm getting choked with your infernal cotton-spinners. Why, there's Austria bound neck, hand, foot, and crop, and everything, to 'Row-home.'

You can't wink there, without leave from a parson. But you must respect them, ma'am. They're gentlemen all the time. The nobles keep up. The scum is kept well in its place. You don't catch them shakin' hands with a low soap-boiler, or sitting down to dinner with a feller that has made the stuff in the very shirt on your back. You don't——Hallo! what's Harold at now?"

A servant had been whispering to Severne for some moments, and that young man had jumped up eagerly, and was hurrying to Sir John.

"My dear guardian," he said, "here's a business! Jordan's come up with news that there's been an accident on the line down near Gorse Point, four miles from the station. I hope to heaven it's not the down train;—the Palmers, you know——"

"I shouldn't be surprised. Since these infernal screaming nuisances have come cutting through the place, anything may happen."

"But we must send help, guardian, and at once," said the young man, hastily; "there may be people killed, or dying, or hurt. I shall go

myself in the waggonette, and—and bring some of the men."

" Do, Harry," said Sir John, earnestly. " See Filby the steward, he'll give you everything; you had better take a crowbar or two and a hammer."

" Leave it to me, Sir John," said the young man, going; " we shall be there in a quarter of an hour. Get out the waggonette, d'ye hear, and Nelly the trotting mare; and look sharp, Duncan."

" She is coming round, sir," said Duncan, quietly; " I thought you'd be going down."

" Sensible fellow, Duncan; I am obliged to you; that was very thoughtful, Duncan."

" And perhaps, sir," said Duncan, in the same quiet way, " the Doctor, sir——"

" Ah, very good too—more thoughtful still, Duncan. Doctor, you must leave your wine, and sit in the back seat. Nelly can take a dozen of us, and find no difference. There is sure to be a job of some sort for you. There—is there anything else anyone can think of?"

There was a little flutter of excitement and

curiosity in the party that remained behind; but it soon subsided, Mr. Canby prophesying that it would all turn out "a bottle of smoke." Captain Philips shrugged his shoulders, and holding his full glass between him and the light, asked his neighbour, in an utterly unimpassioned way, "what they were all fussing about?" When he was told—

"Oh, one of those smashes," he said; "a goods train gone into a coal truck, or into some slow second-class train. Very likely a couple of old women well squeezed, and serve 'em right; why couldn't they travel by the reg'lar express? Everything, you know, must keep out of the way of that."

Then he dwelt on the folly of making up wild-goose chases after such things—"packing out" in a night like that, when the Company had its own fellers paid, "and deucedly well paid, I can tell you," to look after such jobs. "Well," he went on—and in truth he was a little annoyed at the interruption to what he was saying—"Well, as I was saying, there was no better place.

Capital prime beef and mutton, at eight pence a pound—for the good pieces, mind—noble fish," &c.

The waggonette and Nelly was drawn up at the great archway. The lamps were lighted. It was a fine, clear, fresh night, with frost out. The gentlemen got up. Nelly was shaking a necklace of Norwegian bells that she wore round her handsome neck, and was impatient to get away. The music sounded melodious in the night air. Cigars were lit, and without a touch of the whip they were skimming along the iron roads like a Canadian sledge. They were in spirits even. Looking behind, the red lights of the shadowy Digby glowed through the darkness. The doctor alone, with a strangely unprofessional feeling, seemed to regret the pleasant board he had left behind.

"If I could only get off my mind," said Severne, anxiously, "that it wasn't the down train, with the Palmers in it, I should almost enjoy the whole business."

CHAPTER III.

THE VALLEY.

THEY had to drive several miles—further, indeed, than had been announced. The intelligent Duncan, who stood up behind, looking out, as from a watch-tower, soon made out lights.

“There they are, sir,” he said. “We must leave the mare and carriage at the next turn, and shall have to climb up the cutting, sir.” They had to do so. They had to scramble down again, a very high hill and cutting, to get on the line, and there they found the scene of the accident.

No time had been lost. They had met a stray passenger or two hopelessly trying to scale the sides of a gorge, filled with terror and confusion. Below they saw the red light of the engine, which was blowing and dripping steam and vapour like a dying steeple-chaser. Lights, lan-

terns, were dancing about spasmodically below, and to the gentlemen now hastily descending, that little amphitheatre—at perhaps the loneliest part of the line—seemed to be crowded with dark figures, and heavy buildings as dark—which were the carriages. Confused voices and murmuring rose up and met their ears as they came down.

After all, it was not a very serious accident. It was after the usual formula—a long, long luggage train, winding and bending round the curves like an enormous snake, to whom life—and the lives of all that have to do with it—was a burden, had to skulk and creep along the roads like an escaped felon—haunted by the fear of pursuing express trains. And one unlucky one, half overtaken—panting to get forward, for the bare life, had at last been run down by the fiery racer that had so long been at its heels. It was not a *very* violent collision; one first-class carriage had been shattered, the passengers sadly shaken, and some hurt. But the unhappy coal waggons were “smashed” into firewood,

twisted, chopped, bent into a shape that no known human process could purposely reduce them to.

The young men were welcomed like saviours. Agitated women came fluttering round them begging aid. *They* were the first signs of human assistance. The local doctor put them all aside. "Come, now," he said, "who is hurt? Show me the way. Where are they? Any serious fractures—limbs to be set, eh?" The guards came running to him. "You a doctor, sir?" they said. "Then come this way. There is a gentleman here, and a lady, and a child—" and the doctor, much relieved in his mind—for all the way he had thought that "a job" would be the only thing that would compensate for the pleasant joys he had left behind—bustled away after them with much alacrity.

The two young men did all they could to reassure the others. There were very few passengers, at least of the first class. There were some commercial gentlemen who were very noisy, and troublesome on their wrongs. "Always this

way," said one; "as sure as my name is Coxe, I'll have my action-at-law. This is the third time this infernal company has served me in this way. I was due to-morrow at Stamford by six thirty, A.M. Confound 'em, I'll have damages for this, or my name's not Coxe." But this gentleman was quietly and promptly rebuked by Mr. Selby, who told him to "hold that noise, and that it was a shame for him not to be grateful for standing there in a whole skin, and no broken bones—instead of grumbling, as he did." This blunt correction tranquillised him at once.

Young Severne was a true Samaritan—so friendly—so useful—so kindly in tranquillising fears. He was much relieved when he had found that those whom he had expected were not in the train. Another train was due in about half an hour, and a man had been sent down the line with a lantern to stop it. It would take on all the present passengers.

A bright lady—as well as he made out—in a velvet hat, and seal-skin cloak, had passed Severne two or three times wringing her hands.

He went after her. " You are looking for something ? " he said. " You are not hurt I hope ? " Severne was in a rough Irish frieze coat. In the darkness she took him for a sort of countryman.

" Oh," she said, " what shall I do ; there it is gone ! Some one has stolen it—do stir and try and find it for me."

" What ? " said he.

" Oh, my dressing-case, my little dressing-case, with everything I have in the world in it—jewels, everything. I would not lose it for *any* money. Please try, exert yourself, and find it."

" Oh, is that all," said he. " No doubt it is quite safe ; but, ma'am, there are other things to be considered first—human life and human sufferings before dressing-cases."

" Oh, of course, of course, sir," she said, plaintively, now seeing that he was no countryman, " quite right, indeed. My head seems to go round ; I don't know what I am saying or doing, and my husband—you have not seen him, sir ?—Where is he ? Do tell me, quick. I am sure he is hurt."

Severne was about to laugh, but checked himself.

“We must try and find him for you,” he said.

“Find him—find him then, quickly,” she said.

“Oh, where is he? Lead me to him!”

“Come,” said Severne, “this way then.” He saw the doctor at the end of the bank, with a lantern beside him, bending over some one.

“Ah, there he is,” said the lady in an agony of grief, and cast herself down on the ground beside the figure.

It was a tall gentleman, with eyes closed, and a grizzly grey beard and hair. He seemed half insensible, and now and again gave a groan.

“There is something damaged internally,” said the doctor to Severne. “I can’t make it out here; no conveniences you know. No arm or leg broken, however. Now, my *good* madam, please. You can give no assistance with *that* sort of thing—so please.”

“I say—a dressing-case has been found,” Selby said. “The guard has got it. So you need have no anxiety.”

The lady did not hear this speech. "What are we to do?" she said, as if to herself, "he will not speak to me. He does not know me."

"He is coming round," said the doctor. "Give him a little time, you know. Something about the ribs, I suspect. Often happens in these cases."

"But there is nothing serious?" the lady said, now down on her knees in an agony of suspense. "He is not hurt? He will recover?"

Selby came up again at this moment. "Here," he said, "I have got it. Here, ma'am, is your dressing-case, quite safe."

Severne, fond of a little sarcasm at all inappropriate times, even, said, "*It is not hurt; it will recover.*"

"What is to be done, though," said Selby, hastily, "with this poor gentleman? Where can he be taken to? We can't have him lying here."

"There's no house nearer than the 'all, sir," said Duncan, touching his hat.

"Look here, Harry," said Selby, taking him

by the arm, "just a word. I think you must offer these people some shelter. The poor man is seriously damaged, I can see—too much so to go on by the next train; and I think Sir John would not—"

"I am afraid he would," said Severne, a little shortly. "You see, there are the women—perhaps maids, friends, and what not. It's exactly the thing that he *would* object to."

"Good gracious, Harry!" answered the other warmly, "and so you mean to say you would let a poor soul lie in the snow there—die in the snow, perhaps—all because—"

"You old enthusiast," said Severne, laughing, "how you take up things; no one is going to die. Well, you must have everything your own way." He turned round, and went back to the group. The gentleman was half sitting up—his eyes were open. "I think," said Severne, "it would be better if he was taken away out of this." (At this moment the sound of Nelly's bells came faintly through the frosty air.) "We have a carriage waiting that will take us home

in ten minutes, and if this gentleman, and this lady—your husband, I presume—” He looked at her interrogatively.

“ Yes, yes,” she said, eagerly. “ Of course; but he will recover. I know he will—see, he opens his eyes.”

“ Then I suppose it would be the best course ? ” he said, still coldly, and turning to the doctor.

“ Well,” said that gentleman, “ I would recommend it, as there is no other place near.”

“ Very well,” said Severne, shortly, “ let us lose no time then. We can carry him up readily. Perhaps this lady—perhaps you would explain to him—he seems conscious now.”

The lady went down on her knees again in the snow. “ Dearest,” she said, her face close to his, “ how are you now? Would you like to be moved to the house and shelter this good gentleman so kindly offers ? ”

As his full eyes met hers, they drooped, and he did not answer.

“Do you hear that?” said Severne, starting.
“There it is at last!”

Far off through the night came a succession of short screams and interrogative whistlings. This was the coming train snorting indignantly, expostulating at being obliged to stop short, and demanding explanation. Lanterns were seen waving and fluttering violently far away, as if blown by the wind; and the glowing, crimson light of the engine came gliding on, and at last stopped short in a white cloud of its own steam.

The commercial gentleman, still indignant, said it was all fine enough—and it was well they weren’t run into again; it was no fault of the company if they weren’t. But the point was, where would he be by six-thirty to-morrow morning? Others of the passengers, still much fluttered by their escape, shrank away from exposing themselves to this second risk, after such an escape; and some ladies and children were crying. But the guards came up with their old business-like cry, “Now, then, take your seats, please!” and it seemed better

to be taken away at all risks, than left in a defile like that. Besides, as the commercial gentleman remarked, “They’d hardly do the thing over again—at least on *that* night; though he wouldn’t put it past ‘em, mind.” Finally they were all got in—to the surly expostulation of the newly-arrived passengers who were much crowded in consequence—and who also hinted at some sort of punishment to be inflicted on the company—the programme of which was arranged between them and the commercial gentleman all the way up to town.

The cutting was now deserted. Hodge and a friend or two, who had come up too late for profit, were gaping down from the top of the hill, and could make nothing of the business. But they saw the little party coming up, the injured gentleman a little restored by this time—leaning on two gentlemen: and Hodge, as though he were a stage rustic, said to his friend, “Eh, laws ! but that be young Squoire.”

“And young Squoire’s friend,” added the companion, “he wi’ the lang legs!”

“Squoire’s friend” was helping up a lady. Indeed the sides of the cutting were as steep as a hill, and it was very hard work. Nelly was still shaking her bells, having lost all patience, and with head turned round, was taking a wicked and suspicious side-look at the increased party. Young Severne was in command, as it were, and issued orders authoritatively.

“Carefully now,” he said; “some one must sit on each side of him. Duncan, you must get back as you can, or stand on the steps, if you like. Selby, you and this lady go inside, and, doctor, you with me on the box. How do you feel now, sir?”

The iron-grey head—it was a little stooped between the shoulders—gave a sort of courteous bow. “A little better,” he said, faintly. “Only something here,” he said, putting his hand on his chest. His wife was looking from side to side, with a sort of glance of half despair. “Oh, you *are* better,” she said. “Tell me so.”

“Your dressing-case is *quite* safe,” said Severne, with the reins now in his hand. “I saw

it put in myself. All right behind there? Go, Nelly." And immediately the bells began to jangle, and the wheels to "thrum" monotonously along the white frost-bound roads, furnishing to the bell music what seemed to be the drone of a bagpipe.

CHAPTER IV.-

THE NEW ARRIVALS.

IT was past ten o'clock when they came cantering up towards the glowing red lights of Digby. Severne on his box heard the lady behind him murmuring her astonishment and wonder at the pile of building now approaching. She was literally confounded—as, indeed, were many tourists who saw it for the first time—at its grandeur and imposing character.

They all got down; the servants came out. Behind them was the long figure of Sir John, who from the drawing-room had heard Nelly's bells.

Severne ran to meet him with a hasty whisper. “All right, quite right,” said Sir John, “where are they?”

Then he went forward to meet them with a warm hospitality.

“ So sorry,” he said. “ Hope, sir, you are not hurt seriously ? These new-fangled railways will kill us all one day. And you, madam, very glad to see you, too.”

“ Oh, sir,” said the lady, humbly, “ your goodness overpowers us quite.”

“ You are most kind,” said the gentleman, still in evident pain. “ But I am afraid I am hurt seriously.”

“ Look here, Harry,” said Sir John, “ we can put them in the Palmers’ room for to-night—fires burning and all ready. Just the thing. Lean on me, sir. There. We’ll take care of you and make you snug. And, Doctor, you may as well come too.”

Then this hospitable old gentleman bestowed his new guests, and presently the gentleman was laid in bed, in the snuggest apartment in the world, and the Doctor was busy making what he called an “ official examination.”

“ Just what I suspected,” he said—“ coming

home in the carriage : a rib gone—touching the lung. Can be raised very favourably though. Do it at once—judicious bandaging and splints."

The faithful wife alone was present, waiting eagerly for this verdict. She gave a half-scream.

"There's no danger, ma'am," said the Doctor, roughly ; "more inconvenience than danger. Take my advice, and go down to the ladies. Get them to give you a glass of Sir John's old particular green wax. Say I ordered it, if you like. These things give an imperceptible shock, you know."

"Do," said the husband, faintly, "go down, please." She yielded. She glided lightly into the room that had been laid out for Mrs. Palmer, took off her bonnet, smoothed her hair, bathed her face hastily, gave some hasty touches to her dress here and there, re-tied a ribbon or two, and choosing a flower out of a bouquet fresh pulled, that was on the table, contrived somehow to work it into her system. Then she backed a little before the glass, advanced, retreated, and

advanced again—touching and retouching. She was at last satisfied, and went down.

That room was in one of the towers. At the bottom of the stair, which wound a little, there came a long oak corridor, with many doors. It was natural that a mere stranger should be bewildered; and Selby, who had run to his room to fetch something to amuse the ladies, and was scampering back, singing and whistling like a schoolboy, came suddenly upon the new lady, helpless in the windings of a strange house.

“ My goodness,” he said, a little confused. “ Of course, we should have thought of this, and sent some one. I am very sorry—it was so stupid of me.”

“ Stupid! no,” said the lady. “ But I am so glad I met *you*. It is all so awkward—so wretchedly awkward entering, meeting a crowd of strange faces in this painful way. I dread it. I shrink from it. What *shall* I do?”

“ Don’t mind,” he said, hastily; “ you are a guest, you know. Why, they are all so glad. I am sure they are.”

"A guest! No," she said, sadly. "We have no business to be here. We are intruders on your delightful party. I at this moment," and she stopped undecidedly, "ought to be at his bed-side. Naturally it looks unfeeling. Indeed I ought to go back. You must let me."

It then occurred to Selby that he ought *not* to let her go back.

"You must not go," he said, with gentle firmness. "The doctor will look to everything. Women, you know, are always in the way. I mean—confound it; no, I mean, in that sort of place. Come in with me; we can go in together. This is the way."

The door was only a short way off; they heard the merry voices, the more cheerful and polite din, the ringing of ladies' laughter. She held back a moment, with her hand pressing her waist.

"How *can* I face them all," she said, "and he lying there!"

Selby opened the door, and said, gently—
"Courage!"

There was a huge fire-place, like a great archway, where a log fire was burning noisily. The company was gathered round it, the ladies seated, the gentlemen flitting about among them, and the tall, gaunt Sir John standing up in the centre, like a colossal statue. The Dean, in one of the tall-backed arm-chairs, lay placidly with his hands before him, and in the full and encouraging blaze, which lit up his face like a glory, and, at the same time, induced a perceptible drowsiness, while the baronet, standing up over him, still dwelt on the "awful" signs of the times. Mrs. Severne, always tranquil and "sweet," was busy with some work. But the two Fentons, untiring and untired, whether it was the work or play of life, as fresh now as they were at breakfast time, as eager now to work out their earthly salvation as at the inspiring hours of morning, still sent forth the merry peal of appreciation, and by an amazing assiduity were actually making some impression on that worldly and selfish Canby, who was their idol.

"O tell—tell that again, Mr. Canby," said Isabella; "indeed you shall, and you must! I never heard *anything* so funny; and Mrs. Severne, too, must come over and hear it. The best thing you *ever* heard in your life, Mrs. Severne! You *must* come over!"

That lady rose at once, for the engaging young girl had gambolled over to her side.

"I must not lose an opportunity that may never occur again," said Mrs. Severne to her neighbour, without any malice, "of hearing the best thing I may ever hear!"

"O! I declare, 'pon my word," said Mr. Canby, in some confusion at this publicity, "it ain't fair."

At this moment the lady entered.

Sir John stalked forward good-naturedly to meet her. "I hear everything is going on well," he said. "You must sit down here, and warm yourself, and make yourself quite at home; we shall have supper very soon now."

There was a general disarrangement and movement. All faces were turned towards that one face. It looked very different now from what it

had done down at the “cutting,” in the shadow, or under the lantern-light. It was a round, brilliant, full, and well-coloured face ; with good hair, fine eyes, and a sort of delicate *embonpoint* about the figure. “In a vulgar creature, my dear” (looking at her, from an old-lady point of view)—these would have been the elements for brazen effrontery ; but she had such an air of modesty and retirement that they became a fresh charm. The Fentons, interrupted at a critical moment when they had their sickles in the corn, as it were, looked at her with the instinct of hostility—and the Dean, bestirring himself with a sort of shiver, for he had been wakened from a sweet dream, in which he had the good Lord Buryshaft’s hand upon his cuff, and the good lord’s voice in his ear, “My dear Burnaby, Loughborough is failing every day, and when Chester is vacant—” saw the new arrival, very indistinctly. Mr. Canby had his glass in his eye, for the new lady’s attractions were of the effective music-hall pattern—only refined—and half rose to get nearer.

The lady was presently seated among them, and rather astonished Severne and his friend by her quiet composure. She was soon telling the whole story of her sufferings, in a very low voice, and, certainly, without any sensational heightening. "We were coming home from the Continent," she said, "and the passage had been exquisite, not a ripple on the water. Every one was so happy! I sat on the deck, and saw that gay, lively Boulogne grow indistinct in the distance. One always feels regret at leaving a place where one has had such happy happy days."

(Every one present accepted this as a truth, which had an air of novelty from the plaintive tone with which it was spoken; though, indeed, it would seem an obvious truism enough.)

"I beg your pardon," said Severne, eagerly. "So you came from Boulogne by to-day's packet?"

"Yes," said the lady, gently; "I think so."

"Dear me," said Severne, eagerly. "Then you may have met them—the Palmers. Did you

remark a lady and her daughter—a very striking looking girl—‘tallish,’ brilliant colour ? ”

“ What ! with a sort of widow lady ? ”

“ Exactly ; rather French.”

“ A vision—a vision ! ” said the lady, with an enthusiasm that became quite dazzling. “ I never saw such a magnificent creature. She sat on the deck the whole time. A feast to the eye —indeed she was. I never saw any one to compare to her. Even my husband, who from his affection has his own foolish standard—even he —ah, but I little thought then what was in store for us ! ”

There was a silence of respect for a moment. Even the Dean, though the glow of the fire was wooing him back to sweet dreams again, was listening, and at the first convenient opening, had a parallel passage ready from his own life ; as when Lord Edward Somersault came over with him in the Calais packet—let him see—in the disastrous year '29—the year when the landmarks of the Constitution were “swept away”—

"And you spoke to them?" said Severne, eagerly; "you sat near them?"

"Oh dear, yes," said the lady; "charming people they were."

"I am so glad of this," said Severne. "It turns out quite fortunate. They will be here to-morrow. You will renew your acquaintance."

The lady gave a little start: "Acquaintance," she said, sorrowfully. "Oh no, no! they will not recollect *that*. We know what a packet-acquaintance is—faces pass by, and we forget, and never see them again. No: there was a French gentleman who was very, very kind to the young girl. So devoted, and kind, and considerate—not at all like a Frenchman."

"Infernal monkeys," said Sir John. "An Englishman would thrash a room-full. Eat them up, as dog Toby did the rats."

But Severne was a little uneasy, and said no more. The sisters Fenton looked at each other with a little enjoyment; but Canby was evidently interested. "Most curious," he said; "and so you were all on board the packet?"

The lady turned to him gratefully as if this help had made her statement more lucid.

"Yes, we were in the packet. Then came the railway—the carriage—the *dreadful carriage*"—and she shut out the view with her hands.

"'Spress, of course," said Mr. Canby, encouraged by his success.

"Oh, yes," said she, grateful for the correction; "you are quite right. It *was* the express. We came on—up through the charming English country—the grand fields lying out under the sun—the grand English oaks—some way," she added, with a sort of *naïveté*; "it looked so bright and sound and flourishing *after the French country*."

"Ah, ha! ma'am," broke in Sir John; "very good of you! Old England for ever still; you can't compare 'em; their mean, mangy patches, at which they go fiddling, fiddling with bodkins—wretched scrubby things!"

"It was such a bright, encouraging day," went on the lady; "and we all felt so happy at getting home again; and then it began to grow

dark, and he—my dear husband—was talking fondly of our expected fireside, the hearth swept up—our *own* home, never *yet* seen, for we have been married but a short time—”

Gradually a perfect silence had been established, and every one, even the reluctant Fentons, had been drawn in to listen to this natural history. It was impossible not to be interested. Mr. Monkhouse and Captain Philips, the two epicureans of the house, coming in with good spirits from the billiard-room, were awed into decorum by reproachful glances.

“We were talking,” went on the lady, “of what days of happiness were before us,—what quiet joys and innocent pleasures. He had said to me in his kind way, ‘You must enjoy yourself; see what there is of life—for my sake. I have long ceased to care for things of that kind.’ But what am I talking of?” And in great confusion she stopped. Severne smiled.

“By the way,” he said—“excuse me for interrupting you—you got the dressing-case safe? Selby had charge of it, you know.”

“It was taken to the room,” she said, hastily; “and I am so much obliged to Mr. Selby for the trouble he took, and to you, too.”

“Oh! not at all,” said Severne, “we all saw that you were so exceedingly anxious about it.”

“*Indeed I was*,” she said, with her eyes on the oaken floor; “it contained two little pictures that I would not have lost for the world, and some letters—some dear letters——”

“And jewels, I think you said?”

“Harold,” said Sir John, a little gruffly; “see and push on supper, will you? we are all getting hungry. Well, you were talking, you say, ma’am, about old England?”

“Oh, yes,” she said; “and we had just caught a glimpse of red lights glittering afar off. Oh, it *must* have been *this* house.”

“Was it where there was a break in the hills, near the pond?” asked Sir John, eagerly.

“Yes, yes,” she said, eagerly; “a pond—there was—exactly.”

“I knew it,” said Sir John; “it’s the best view of the place; you shall see it in the morn-

ing. I made that myself thirty-five years ago; and these rascals came with their infernal line and cut it all up."

"The very place," said the lady. "How strange that you should know! Then, as we were speaking, came a crash,—and oh!" She covered up her face. There was a 'silence. The two Fenton girls looked at each other, and rustled their dresses with impatience. One tried to catch Mr. Canby's eye, but that gentleman was absorbed by the new Scherazade, and the labours of a hard day—the ascent up the tower, &c.—had all been spent in vain.

"Don't think of it," said Sir John. "It will all come right again. We'll make him well; only I hope in God," said the Baronet, with infinite energy, "you'll have your action against 'em. I'll speak to him to-morrow."

"Lord Campbell's Act—" said the barrister, who practised at country houses; "quite sure to get damages; jury always find against the company."

"Glad to hear it," growled Sir John; "hope

they'll salt 'em. Look at these pictures, ma'am," he went on, lighting a candle. "No mushrooms here; every one of 'em true blue, and gentlemen to the backbone; no cotton-spinners on my walls, ma'am; look at that—and that—you won't find a Digby here, ma'am, that soiled his finger with infernal ledgers and figures,—no, no."

The lady was charmed with these fine old portraits, and every fresh one to which she was introduced brought new surprise. They had, indeed, all the grim wooden-look of regular ancestry—with a polite scowl, and stony contempt—seeming also too heavily encumbered with fine clothes to do any work.

"Pon my word, you *had* a narrow escape," said Sir John, as they went down the room a little. "Look at that, now. Bishop Digby. That's 'Digby's Short Method with Dissenters' in his hand. I'll show it you in the library—the finest work ever written. He kept your mean, unmannerly, pot-house Dissenters in their places. None of your fiddle faddle complaints, and scrape me, scrape you, ideas. They were not

gentlemen, ma'am," said Sir John, angrily, as if *she* had said they were, "and he didn't want to know 'em, or see 'em, or be conscious of their existence."

"Oh! It is dreadful," the lady said, reflectively. "It is, and was, ma'am," said Sir John; "you are perfectly right, and, I tell you what, we have not seen the end of it yet. By the way," he added, changing his tone, "What's 'er name, ma'am? They told me below; but I have the worst head for names."

"Lepell!" said the lady, softly; "Mr. and Mrs. Lepell."

"Lepell!" said he, almost joyfully; "no—very good, very good indeed. There's the true ring in that, ma'am. There's Lepells in Yorkshire, and I knew a Lepell in Warwickshire—a real gentleman, was in the House with me, and walked into the lobby with me against Peel's *infamous* measure of '29."

The lady started—something like delight came into her eyes, "Why that was *his* cousin, sir,—a noble-hearted man. I have often heard him speak of him."

“ My dear madam, I am so glad,” he said, in real enjoyment ; “ let me welcome you to Digby. I hope you will stay with us some time. He’s dead, I know, poor Jack Lepell. Between you and me he took that vile selling the pass of Peel’s to heart; a low swindle, ma’am, and served us all right for sitting down to table with a fellow of *that* kind. You know the reeking kind of effluvia in those cotton places. It makes me sick. Faugh ! And now, who has the place after Jack—your husband ? ”

“ No,” said she, softly, as if this were a trial too ; “ the Colonel : he is out in India ; they say has embarrassed the property.”

“ Ah ! that was poor Jack’s doing—a true gentleman, above your low accounts and ledger-ings ! and so they swindled him ? And you, my dear madam ? Forgive me if I am inqui-sitive.”

“ I was Miss Bell—Jenny Bell,” she said, as it were, in terror ; “ of a good family, too, sir—indeed, yes, but not rich.”

“ What harm in that ? ” said Sir John ;

“nothing to be ashamed of. Some cotton black-guard, I dare say, has been too much for them, eh ?”

“Oh, sir,” said Mrs. Lepell, starting, “how did you know—who told——”

“It’s the old story, my dear,” he said; “I hear of these things. Bell is a good name—egad, now that I think of it, the bishop there married some Bell or other. I’ll look it out. By the way, ask me to show you his book to-morrow—as fine a work as ever you read.”

They were still opposite the bishop, a grim prelate—with an enormous wig that seemed like two down pillows, with huge white sleeves, that seemed like two more, with his right hand resting on a great quarto, sloped at an angle: just as the General, a short way down, had his bâton sloped at an angle. This massive volume was labelled “Short Method,” &c.

Sir John put out his candle and led her back to the company. “My dear madam, here’s a discovery. Our friend up stairs is cousin to an old friend. This is Mrs. Lepell; no one knew

Jack Lepell better than I did. I am so glad. Let me introduce to you his cousin's wife."

Mrs. Severne got up with alacrity, and with a beaming face. "I am so glad," she said, taking her hand, "it has turned out in this way."

(Mrs. Severne always did the right thing, and with true breeding would be almost rustic in her welcome, when an occasion required.)

"Jack Lepell was one of the old Guard—a true man, until Peel and his gang broke his heart, I do believe. Mrs. Lepell here knows it well. By Jove, I must go up and see Lepell and talk to him."

"He's asleep," Sir John, said Severne, "and supper's coming up."

"That's not at all a bad notion," said Captain Philips, brightening up, "I was just thinking of something hot and comfortable. We're all getting so proper and decent, people 'll be ashamed to be seen eating a cutlet by-and-by."

"Not in this house, sir," said Sir John, "nor o sit down to it either."

"Ah! that's a *very* good notion, too," said the

officer, coolly. "One get's hungry so soon in these airy houses. Then to be huddled in to a sideboard, to pick a bit here and a bit there—"

"Ah! that's the new school," said Sir John. "Ah! there it is at last. Take my arm, Mrs. Lepell. I am very *glad* to have you here. I am indeed. You must be hungry; and if you don't take your glass of Burgundy, and two wings of the roast wild duck, we shall quarrel, I warn you—"

"You are so kind, Sir John," she said, "I almost feel getting into spirits again—which I ought not to do."

They passed out of the drawing room into a "snug" little octagon room, where there was a fire and a round table. It was reached by no draughty passages, infinitely to the satisfaction of Captain Philips, who had not to put up his coat collar. "Our friend has his sensible points; and really I don't object to this bit of Old Times. Something very savoury," added the captain, sniffing, "seems like game—eh, Monkhouse? Ther'll not be room for us. Come quick to the

side-table—out of the way, you see, and room for your arms; and I am sick of talking to the women—and we'll get a bird or so, quietly, over for ourselves." And there was presently a cheerful and noisy party about the large round table; and precisely as he had arranged, Captain Philips, with apparent self-sacrifice, was bestowed at the side-table, where he received greater attention than anyone in the room.

CHAPTER V.

“LORD JOHN.”

AGAIN a pleasant scene had set in; this was what *he* called cozy, Sir John said, and he was fairly right, if there was “coziness” in a warm room with a sharp frost outside, and light, and cheerful faces, and an unfashionable appetite. “I can tell you,” said Captain Philips, “this is an uncommonly good bird. They have done him not a minute too long. Here! don’t take that away,” (this was to the servant carrying off the bird), “and see, get a lemon here, will you—and the Harvey sauce, will you?”

At this moment the door was opened softly, and a red, elderly face, much heated, was put in. The eyes of the red face were a little strained and bloodshot, but there was a gay, rollicking twinkle in the eyes. “Ah! at work,” said the voice

belonging to the face, “and uncommonly good work, too ; am I in time, eh ?”

“ Come in, come in, Lord John !” said Sir John, heartily ; “ you *are* in time, and I am glad of it. Put down your coat in the corner there.”

Lord John came in at once, pulling off gloves and a comforter and a coat.

“ I was dining with them at the barracks, and couldn’t pass the house—just for a finish. I told them below to put up the gig.”

Captain Philips had looked round with disgust the moment he saw the red face.

“ Here’s that drinking Lord ! Close up well, can’t you, or they’ll be sticking him in beside us. Really, it is too bad ! No room for a man’s arms ; always the way in these houses ; can’t let you eat your bit in comfort.”

“ Over there, Lord John,” said Sir John, heartily, “ next to Philips. He’ll make room for you.”

Lord John had gone over.

“ Push up, will you ?” he said, dragging in his chair. Send that bird here, Philips ; don’t swallow him *all* up, you know. Wait and I’ll begin with a

nip of the brandy to drive the frost out of my chest. Here, Sam, cordials down here.”

Captain Philips said nothing, but with yet more marked disgust moved away.

“Just let me——,” he said, retaining the bird, “before you begin; I had this breast half off before you came in.”

“It is an infernal night out,” said Lord John; “not sorry I took that nip now. I wanted something warm inside.”

This was Lord John Raby, an elderly bachelor, who had a small box close by, where he lived a great deal, and to a far greater extent ranged the country, preying on his neighbours, and dropping in without ceremony at all hours, and with the same freedom, always asked for “something warm.” He had been in a fast cavalry regiment, and was said to have done something about which hung a little mist that was disreputable. He had lived much in Paris when he was young, was full of strange stories, and had a curiously free manner.

They were very gay at the round table. Mrs.

Lepell, the new guest, was now quite at home, unrestrained, and very amusing. She said she was not ashamed to own that *she was very hungry*, for they had had a very long and weary day of it.

“I am glad you are hungry—very glad,” said Sir John, “and have the sense to say so. I like a woman that is not ashamed to take her food. All the fine young girls of my day eat plenty, and got all their good looks from eating, I can tell you.”

“I begin not to care what they say,” said Mrs. Lepell. “We were always Conservatives in *that*, as in other points. And I always think and say, *in my little way*, that you should be *consistent*, Sir John, and carry out whatever you believe, even in small details. That is *our creed*, is it not, Sir John?”

“It is!” said he, with delight, “’pon my soul it is! No shamming and skulking for us! Be whatever you are to the very backbone.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Lepell, “I would have it even in the colour of our dress, Sir John.”

Mrs. Severne smiled.

“Really you are quite an ardent believer,” she said.

“It is quite refreshing to meet such enthusiasm,” said her son. “You put our sluggish consciences to the blush.”

“Who is she, Philips?” asked Lord John; “where did he pick her up? Fine woman, I say; I like her *tournure*.”

“Came to-night,” said Captain Philips; “if you’re quite done with that sherry wine, you know—thanks. No bread in the room,” he added, getting up; “every one must learn to wait on himself in this house.”

In a few moments the ladies had gone, and it was past midnight. The gentlemen had risen. “Just one snip more, Digby; want lining sadly in this frost, and then for the gig.”

“Let the gig stay where she is,” said Sir John, “take my advice; there’s a room ready with a fire and a bed, so you may take it or not, as you like.”

“Egad then, I will,” said Lord John. “You make your house too snug, Sir John. That

notion of the fire did the business ; quite a picture, you see, and with a cigar——”

“ Here, and take the balance of that cognac. You may as well.”

“ Egad then, I will,” said Lord John. “ ‘ For these and all other blessings, Dean,’ Bless the cheerful giver, I say. Good night to every one. You shouldn’t have mentioned the fire, Sir John. That did the business !”

“ You’d better look after his curtains,” said Captain Philips. “ You can tell Duncan, or some of them. He’ll fuddle himself and set the place on fire. You may as well. I won’t sleep comfortable unless you promise me. That beast !” he said, later, as he went to his room, “ a greedy, guzzling, selfish sot. Took the whole of the breast of that bird, without a word. He has taken to driving over to our mess at ten and eleven at night. But I’m never at home. And as I told him plainly last week, I don’t keep a club or a bar. The other fellers may do as they please. Goodness, what a ramshackle house this is !”

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LIBRARY—"THE SHORT WAY."

NEXT morning every one was down betimes—a point on which Sir John was a little particular—a point, too, at which Captain Philips grumbled a good deal. "It did well enough," he said, "fifty years ago; but really forcing people out of their nightgowns, with a fire just lit, and in weather like that, was rather too much," &c. Every one was in the breakfast room in time, excepting the Miss Fentons, and another lady; indeed Sir John strictly required attendance at a sort of ritual which he performed himself; but, as Captain Philips said, "*he supposed* he knew how to say his 'Our Father,' at least without going to school *again*; and to be tumbled out from your warm sheets at *that* hour!" &c., &c.

The Miss Fentons fluttered in when breakfast

was half over in the most unconcerned way, although Sir John's eyes were upon them, and he bade them good morning very testily.

"It's no use scolding us, Sir John," said the younger; "we do our best, you know; and if you keep us so agreeably every night, we can't help it. Why, we are not *half* of us down! Where is Mrs. Lepell?"

This was not an unskilful diversion; and at the moment Mrs. Lepell entered, very demure, and with an expression that might be composed, or sad, or sober.

"Well, Mrs. Lepell," called out Sir John, in his hearty way, "come up near me. (You are late, but this is your first morning.) Now, how is the patient?"

"Oh, I don't know, Sir John," she answered, settling her napkin. "A very wretched night—restless and troubled. He may be better, and he says he is."

"Oh, come," said Sir John, "that looks well."

Severne was at a side-table helping some cold game.

“A wretched night, and looks better. *I* don’t think that promises well. We had better send for the doctor.”

“He *is* to be here, you know,” said Mrs. Lepell, “the first thing in the morning, without losing a moment.”

“Yes,” said Severne, cutting up briskly, “it was the last thing I said to him.”

“There’s a fellow riding up the avenue now,” said Captain Philips. “By the way, will you”—he never addressed the host as Sir John—“will you let me get some toast done? I always like it very thin and *short*, you know; and I’d recommend you to have it that way. You see,” he added, bending a piece with a sort of half-restrained disgust, “it gets soddened and damp *this* way. It is quite as little trouble for them, you know.”

It was the doctor, who came in cheerily in a few minutes. Mrs. Lepell rose nervously. “Now we shall know,” she said, in a low voice.

“Well, Watson,” said Sir John, “been up?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, who walked in without

notice. "Bad night, he says, pain here. But all that's natural, Sir John, after a shock of *that* kind. We want a little fillip, you know. I have no doubt he'll be all straight in a day or so."

There was great delight in Mrs. Lepell's face.

"Thank Heaven!" her neighbour heard her murmur.

"I am glad of it—very glad, to hear this," said Sir John; "poor Jack Lepell's cousin, too. I'll just step up and say good morning to him."

Mrs. Lepell rose hastily. "We shall go together, Sir John," she said with a smile. "If you will take me—that is. I should lose my way in these *wonderful* rooms and corridors. It bewilders me! Everything is so *rast and long*!"

"Then you must stay here until you learn them by heart, ma'am," said Sir John, gallantly. "You must take me with you now, to show you the road." (It almost seemed as if it was Mrs. Lepell had proposed to go and see her husband, and that Sir John wished to go with her.)

He entered the bedroom cheerfully. "Well, how are we to-day?" he called out. "Better, I

am told. Nothing but a rib gone, after all. It's happened to me over and over again—huntin', you know, and egad we'll have *you* huntin', sir, before the week's out—that is," he added, a little gravely, "if this frost *would* go."

A sad-looking, dejected, classical head lifted itself from the pillow. It had a deep iron-grey beard and moustache; the eyes were soft and melancholy; there were lines of care about the cheeks, but over all was a sweet, gentle expression, full of nature and simplicity and kindness. The age of that face was about forty-five years.

He spoke now, but with some pain. "I don't know how to thank you, Sir John, for this goodness. I only heard this morning where I was—in what good hands."

"We'll take care of you, never fear," said Sir John. "Of course you've heard Jack Lepell speak of me?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Lepell, "indeed, yes. You recollect, dear?"

Mr. Lepell put his hand to his forehead. "It seems like a dream to me that I have heard the

name before, somewhere. I saw him very little."

"But you told me, dear," said Mrs. Lepell, reproachfully, "just think—you recollect——"

"Then *I* knew him well," said Sir John, "and I helped him, too, and a fine fellow he was. No matter, I tell you what, we *must* put you on your legs. We are sending in—and there is the county doctor there. Lord Bulstrode always has him—fine fellow, Bulstrode—goes up to town, literally *roaring*, ma'am, with his gout—not able to stiffen his back—to fight against that—that Maynooth thing!"

"Dreadful—oh, *dreadful!* " said Mrs. Lepell, in protest against that foundation.

"Yes, ma'am, I could tell you stories about the intrigues of men that should know better. I assure you, sir, *she* is sound; and I congratulate you, for in these days the women do mischief enough. I tell you what, Lepell—will you get up?—try, you know, it may do you good, fighting against a thing."

"I am afraid," said Mr. Lepell, trying to move.

"Yes, try, dear," said she, laying her hand on his shoulder. "As Sir John says, make an effort. I am afraid we shall be such a constraint."

But an expression of pain came into his face.

"If you could," said Sir John. "We have a party to-day, you know. No, no! it's not to be thought of. I'll send you up lots of books to amuse you. I'll take Mrs. L. to the library—fine standard collection—and *she* shall pick you out something. By the way, Fireirons sent me in by this morning his great book, 'England in the Leprosy,' a fine thing, but I haven't had time to cut the leaves as yet. Come, ma'am."

She fluttered back a moment. "Let me put this pillow higher, dear." But the classic iron-grey head seemed to shrink away from any alteration in his position. Then they got in to the old library, whose walls were comfortably clothed with books, perhaps the warmest of all furniture, and with books whose backs were all rusted and oxygenized.

"Here's 'England in the Leprosy,'" said Sir John. "We'll send it up to him at once. See

here—look here, Mrs. Lepell. Pitt's Life, five volumes; Sir Robert Inglis's pamphlets, all bound together, very fine reading, I can tell you; Hume and Smollett. Here's good Constitutional reading to put into the hands of the young, not the swash and water of that low Whig, Mac.—Mc.—what's his name?"

Mrs. Lepell was delighted with these treasures. She looked at the first volume of Hume, his binding and his type and paper, with an interest that was not unnatural, considering the praises bestowed on that fine master of writing. Then she recollected herself.

"Oh, Sir John, you promised last night—you know you did—that charming picture of the Bishop in your family—'The Sure Way to Heaven.'"

"I know," Sir John had said with enthusiasm, and was at the end of the room on a ladder dragging down Bishop Digby's work before he had heard Mrs. Lepell's most natural mistake as to the title of the book.

"Here it is! A great work—'The Short Way

with Dissenters.' I tell you what, ma'am, if the Bishop's plan had been followed—and it would have been, only there was a gang of schemers governing the country at the time—England would have been a different place from what it is now. Take it to your room, ma'am, and read it (every word is worth gold in these times), and tell me what you think of it," and Sir John placed "The Short Way,"—an old calf-bound, dingy, dusty book, as yellow as the Bishop's own face in the picture—in Mrs. Lepell's willing arms. She received it with delight.

At this moment Severne and his friend Selby came in.

"Have you seen his lordship, Sir John? No; I dare say he's not down yet."

"He was not at breakfast," said Sir John; "I must go round the farm though. Will you look after Mrs. Lepell here?"

That lady was left suddenly with the two gentlemen.

"Well, what do you *wish* to do?" said Severne; "some of us are going to skate. By the way, that

looks an appalling volume you have got there. What is it—a Latin dictionary?"

Mrs. Lepell almost blushed as he took it from her: he looked at her with an amused look.

"What! 'The Short Way!—' Oh, Selby, look here, my friend! So you are going to read 'The Short Way'?"

Selby smiled too. She bit her lip, and coloured yet more. ¶

"He *wished* me to read it," she said. "Of course it would not be much in my way; perhaps I would not understand a word of it. But still, I think there would not be much harm in trying, especially as it is a little fancy of his, and he has been so kind to us—"

"Well, after all," said Selby, "where's the crime? I had to take it once; but a page was about the allowance I could manage."

"Who talks of crimes?" said Severne, with gaiety. "Heaven forbid that I should interfere between Mrs. Lepell and her 'Short Way'! Will you come down and see us skate?—at least such of us as don't tumble flat; a pretty exhibition it

will be. There's a sleigh, too, with bells, if you like going down in *that*. The carpenter knocked it up yesterday, out of an old gig, I believe; but we have grand Russian furs to cover up the multitude of sins—that is, the old leather."

Mrs. Lepell shook her head sadly. "I am to be a nurse to-day. To-morrow, perhaps."

"And you have 'The Short Way' also," said Severne; "I forgot *that*. Very well; I must go and look up the skates." He went away joyously.

Selby approached her a little shyly. "Severne is *such* a rattling fellow; says whatever comes into his head. You mustn't mind him. And as for 'The Short Way'"—he added, hesitating, "I suppose it *is* a good book."

They both laughed.

"*You* understand me," she said. "It is Sir John's little fancy, and I am not ashamed to humour it. It will give me a little trouble, I confess, and it is not quite so pleasant as a French novel—I mean, as a novel. But still, Mr. Selby, he was a bishop, and a good and a holy bishop, and this seems a good thick book, and with some

reputation ; and, surely, in all these pages there must be some sense, or something that could improve one, or be profitable. That is *my* little view, Mr. Selby." And with a heightened colour and a toss of her head she passed out of the room, carrying her tawny volume with her. Selby looked after her in a dreamy way, then went out slowly by another door.

The ice was on the two long Dutch ponds, between which ran the avenue. They looked now as dark as ebony, and any one coming down the avenue—Hodge, perhaps, with his team—heard the faint grinding on the ice, like the clicking and whirring of wheels. Stopping a moment, he saw some little black figures, like flies, fluttering up and down—swooping, soaring—in that most marvellous of human motions. One or two were twirling like tops, waltzing, spinning, and performing the most surprising evolutions. The clergyman's son, the doctor's brothers, a commercial traveller up from the village—for a pond is a republic, and skating the very essence of democracy—were all busy with this delightful

exercise, with the feeling that Christmas-day had been but yesterday ; that the holly was still fresh and green, that the great house was full, and that there were cheerful evenings to come, when the red curtains would be drawn. Fresh days, flowing days, with a sense of healthful enjoyment, born of this delightful exercise ; which to some schoolboys, home for a week to the clergyman's house, and barely over the rudiments, getting terrific falls, and cruel injuries, and not in the least daunted, seemed almost paradise upon earth. The gentlemen found it "well enough" for an hour or two ; but these lads had begun with the light, and would go on until darkness came ; and, certainly, of a fresh, bracing evening, when the shadows were drawing on, and a cold, steel blueness was settling down, and a light or two was twinkling up and down in the house, the ponds stood out like a great sheet of frosted cake, the skating acquired a new charm from this time, and it seemed almost impossible to tear oneself from its fascinations.

But Severne was soon tired of it. "What shall

we do now?" he said, dragging off his skates. "Good gracious! How frantic I used to be about this sort of thing at college! Let us take a gun, and take a shooting stroll, without any men, fuss, or preparation, after the rabbits."

"Or take the ladies a drive," said Selby. "We ought to make ourselves civil and useful in some way."

"Do you mean my mother, or the Miss Fentons?" said Severne, with a curious look; "you *are* getting quite devoted. I must go and tell her. I can go shooting by myself. Hallo! what is this now?"

They heard the jingling of the Norwegian bells, and saw the improvised sleigh, covered up in the rich furs Severne had spoken of. There were two horses cantering along, and a lady and gentleman. They stopped a moment to look at the skating.

"Why, I declare, it's that woman," said Severne, "and Lord John!"

CHAPTER VII.

LORD JOHN AND MRS. LEPELL.

MRS. LEPELL went back to her husband's room, but soon returned to the library. Perhaps she had forgotten "The Short Way;" or perhaps the patient had fallen into a doze. It was a little hard to expect "a fine, fresh, young woman to be chained to a bed-side, in this fine stirring weather." This was the view of Lord John, who had lain long in bed, as was his wont—had had his "morning" very late, also his wont; and was now, as he said, all fresh and light for the day—as if the day itself was a serious Herculean labour, to be faced. He was roaming through the house trying to find some one to "have a turn at the cues" with—for he felt his hand tolerably steady now—when he came upon Mrs. Lepell in the library. He was not in the least likely to be put off his

centre by such a meeting, though he had not yet spoken to her. In fact, he entered with great confidence, and said "Good morning," with the greatest heartiness and delight. "How are you?" he said, "very glad you have come—will shake us up a bit here. You saw me come in last night. Lord John, you know. Digby has sent over for my little kit; so they're going to make me stay."

Mrs. Lepell was not in the least disturbed. She met him in the same cordial fashion. "I am so glad, too," she said, smiling. "We shall be here some days, I suppose. It depends—"

"By the way," said Lord John, "how is himself? as they say in Ireland. Egad, I'm only down myself ten minutes. What with the sitting up last night and the other things, it's impossible to do it. Besides, why should one? I don't want to make my soul in *that* sort of way—prudence, temperance, and the rest—frankly confess it wouldn't repay, you know. Leave all that to the professionals. Shocked, eh?"

But the lady was not in the least shocked. At least she was so amused at Lord John's droll

profanity that with the best intentions to reprove, her lips gave way. "I am afraid, Lord John, *you have not much reverence.* Those French men of the world are dreadful people."

"Are they?" said he, "are they now? My dear child, if you only knew the French *women* you would say they were funny people to send a poor boy over to be instructed by. Yet that's what my unnatural parents did to me."

"Now you must not, Lord John," said she. "No wicked French stories."

Lord John laughed loudly and took a chair. "Nothing you'd like better, Mrs. L. I see it in your eye; and a very fine one it is—as fine as any French one."

"Now Lord John, you are getting bold; you will have to be scolded."

"Scold away, my dear woman." (Lord John was noted for these little familiarities, but everybody made allowance—French life, &c.) "What are you doing among these old fusty books here? This isn't the place for you, Mrs. L. You are out of keeping."

"But I like reading, Lord John; I do, indeed."

"She does, indeed!" repeated he, with great enjoyment. "Oh, listen to her! Of course she does. Likes the Fathers, I'll swear. Prefers St. Chrysostom and what's St. his name to George Sand. Maybe you'd oblige a friend with the loan of an odd volume of St. Thomas—come, only for ten minutes? Why shouldn't I make my soul as well as another man? Come, give it. I declare I see it in your pocket there."

Mrs. Lepell half rose. Perhaps she was a little alarmed at his familiarity.

Very naturally she hesitated. "I don't think I can," she said. "What would they say, Lord John? Alone with you, and no other lady. No; I cannot."

He laughed. "Uncommon good, and why should you be afraid of me now? Have they been telling you any stories? But I assure you I am not the man I was; I am not, indeed. I have turned over a new leaf, I have indeed. I am converted. You may see me with a gown on one of these

days. My brother has two livings, you know, and his own regular fellow is seventy-eight, if he is a day."

This wicked lord was so diverting and in such good spirits this morning, that even with a wish to reprove, the lady could not help smiling.

"Well, come now," he said, "don't let us be squeamish ; and I tell you what, they've a new horse that I chose for the baronet, and he'll go nobly under the sleigh. Old Sir John doesn't like him, I believe ; but that's not much. At this moment there isn't a judge of a horse under the roof but myself ; and do you know I begin to think *you* have an eye for a bit of blood—I mean in horses. On my soul I do. By my old grandmother (who left me only an old prayer-book in her will, an old skin-flint !) I think you have. I see it in the corner of your eye ! Hallo, Sir John, we are going to have out Toby under the sleigh."

"Then take Mrs. Lepell a turn round the park. The very thing, and I say—go up by the pond, where there is a good view of the house."

“ All right, sir,” said his lordship, “ she knows about horses, too.”

“ I am sure she does,” said Sir John. “ Every Lepell I ever met, did. Not, understand me, living in stables with grooms and jobbers, which they tell me is the fashion now; but enough to have a pretty seat in your saddle, and know a fine horse when you see one. Yes, you must go, Mrs. Lepell; take her round by the pond and the high plantation, then by Mangerton, whence you get another capital view of the house. Then, let me see——”

“ All right,” said his lordship, winking, “ leave us to ourselves. We’ll pass round by Mangerton, depend upon it.”

“ But I think, Sir John,” said she, timidously, “ I could hardly see beauties of nature with Lord John?—perhaps Mrs. Severne would be coming?”

“ Egad, and you *have* been telling her something, Digby,” said his lordship, in convulsions of enjoyment. “ But it’s a hard case now that the wild oats should be brought up against a man

in this way. Tell her I'm like a child at a mother's knee, or next door to a bishop. I am, on my soul."

Sir John looked grave. Bishops were part of the State. "I have met many a bishop at your brother's table," he said; "men of real sound principle. The sleigh only holds two. So there would not be room. I want you to see this view, ma'am, and you were so wishing it yourself last night."

"Indeed I do," she said, eagerly, "and I am sure, by daylight—"

"By the way, how far have you got in the bishop's book, ma'am?" said Sir John, looking down suddenly.

"I have not begun *yet*, Sir John," said she, smiling; "I am keeping it for a quiet moment at the fire, when I shall have it all to myself—the curtains drawn—a regular *bonne bouche*, Sir John."

"You must take care of it," said he, a little testily. "Don't hold it in that way, please."

(Mrs. Lepell was supporting the "Short Way"

under her arm, with her fingers absently playing among the leaves.)

“I suppose if anything happened to this I should not know where to look for a copy. This is worth gold, ma’am, so please take care. Well, you won’t go and see the views ? ”

“Nothing I should like more,” said she. “Do let us go, Lord John, I am sure I should enjoy it.”

“Well, then, let us look sharp,” said his lordship, “or it may be gone before we get there ; ha, ha ! I declare. O this is great, great ! ” and with much secret enjoyment he went out of the room to order the vehicle round, leaving the lady a little disquieted as to what he was alluding to as “great, great ! ”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DRIVE.

IN a few moments it was at the door, with Lord John, in an enormous cloak with capes, (which he may have borrowed from the coachman, or had made for himself on the coachman model,) busy examining the legs of the new horse, Toby. Sir John came out with them.

“ You can’t patch him up into a gentleman,” said he; “ he’s a low horse, low in cut and blood.”

“ You are out, Sir John,” said the other; “ I know a horse as well as my own head, and this fellow is as good a beast, as you are a Conservative. Why Mrs. Lepell here gives it against you.”

That lady started.

“ Indeed I do not,” she said, warmly.

“But you did, you know, up in the library there. Come jump in and make yourself snug. I tell you what, Sir John, Toby’s been badly driven by some Radical on the box. I’ll make him go. Though as for that there’s not a horse born that I wouldn’t make go,—or mare either. Fush! Get up! Go away from his head—stewpid!” And with a grinding not unmusical, the sleigh started off very smoothly, and Toby in particular more than bore out his purchaser’s warrant.

“There! what did I say?” said his lordship. “That old Tory thinks he knows wine and horses, and he’s as ignorant as an owl. And politics, too. It makes me sick to hear him talk! He’s damaging the party, he is, with those old saws and screws. Upon my soul I believe he’d put us into wigs and steel chokers to-morrow. How would you like me, Mrs. L., in a wig or a steel collar? Speak out, my dear lady, you know we’re in confidence here. Let me tuck this rug about you, and we can both be snug together!”

But he was mistaken if he fancied they were both to be snug together.

“I am not cold,” she said, with a voice that was a little decided; “nor am I Lord John’s dear lady. You must call me Mrs. Lepell, Lord John, in future, if you wish us to be good friends.”

Lord John burst into a roar, and gave Toby a sudden “cut” that made him fling his heels well up. “O Lord! this is great, great!”

“In fact, I must lecture you a little,” she said, in the same grave tone; “as I say, to prevent us coming to a quarrel later. In the first place, what *is* great? Though I think I know what you mean.”

“Bet you a sovereign you don’t,” said his lordship, again cutting at Toby, who really did not deserve such persecution, and resented it as before.

“I suspect,” said she, “you mean some reference to my sincerity—that I am acting a part. You are amused at the notion, and laugh in my face. Not very respectful to poor me, Lord John.”

“What an odd woman you are!” said Lord John. “On my soul I never met your match, and I have met lots.”

“There again, Lord John,” she said; “‘woman,’ you know, to a lady whom you have spoken to for the first time to-day. I am afraid you must think not very complimentarily of me, or else *I* must think——” She stopped.

“Not very complimentarily of me, eh? Go ahead; don’t be afraid. You won’t catch me blushing. Look at that virgin cheek! Why, my dear gir—Mrs. Lepell, I mean (I was near stumbling then)—I have had too much of that sort of thing to mind, and if I chose at this moment I could astonish you—I could. There was a woman I once knew in Paris——”

“I don’t want to hear about her,” said Mrs. Lepell, with a half comic air of reproof. “You are incorrigible, Lord John, I fear, and will die impenitent.”

“It’s uncommonly likely,” said his lordship, gravely. “I suppose they’ll put on the parsons, you know. I say, what did I say about Toby?

Isn't he going nobly ! And to think of the old baronet talking about gentlemanly horses. I say that was very good about the old bishop's book. Why didn't you take it out in the sleigh with you ? "

They were coming to the skaters. The gentlemen were just leaving the pond when the sleigh came up.

" We can take *this* turn if you like," he said, " if you don't wish to face them. It'll be half-a-mile round."

" Not wish to face them ! Why should we do that ? " she answered, in wonder. " What do you mean I am to be afraid of, Lord John ? "

" Confound it," said he, a little impatiently (and again lashing Toby). " You must be wonderfully simple, or just out of school, or brought up in a convent. You don't take a hint ; but must have everything explained to you in black and white. Are you a shepherdess, eh ? ' Phyllis is my only joy ! Rum ti-ti, rum ti-ti.' Well, well ! After all, one sees droll things every day, if one only keeps his eyes open. Of course I

mean that tumbling on his nose there. Thus you go smash, stupid, and crack your nose! You're not the first."

Mrs. Lepell's face changed. There was a maliciousness in his face that showed he was not to be trifled with. "I am afraid you are a little unkind," she said; "or take dislikes, and have some special dislike to me."

"No," said he, carelessly. "But let me give you a little advice. Don't be too cautious. Now see here. A woman of the world would have liked to have *seen the view* round there, and avoided those ponds, which are flat and poor; especially a lady who is so fond of views. Besides that's the way to Mangerton, as Sir John desired you."

"Oh, then, let us go, Lord John," she cried, hastily.

"No, no, too late now!" said Lord John, decidedly.

"But then you will tell me I like 'a Short way,' Lord John," she said, slyly, with her eyes down on the fur.

Lord John nearly choked with laughter, and with genuine laughter. "Ah, *that's* good—really good. Oh, I see we'll do! You said that uncommonly well. Ah! Mrs. Lepell, you're very smart—not a shepherdess, exactly. Very far from it. No offence, I hope?"

Mrs. Lepell looked at him a little puzzled, and with an expression of dread. "I am afraid you are vindictive," she said.

"Not I," said his lordship, again dealing severely with Toby, against whom he had conceived some sudden animosity. "I don't know what's the matter with this brute to-day. I'll make him go, though;" and he began scourging the round quarters of the horse with fresh vigour. Toby's companion was speeding along with great gravity and earnestness; but Toby himself—no "gentleman," indeed, as Sir John had said with perfect truth—he had the "low drop" in him, as he presently showed by stopping short with sudden violence, flinging his head into the air, and setting his fore feet firmly against the ground, as if to resist the efforts of some one dragging him

down into the bowels of the earth. That unjust lashing of his sides was beginning to bear fruit. His lordship grew angry.

“What a brute—an ill-conditioned brute!” he said. “Did you ever see his like? I wish to heaven I had brought a good cutting whip.” (His lordship was so confident of the merits of the animal he had chosen, that he had declined to take a whip of that sort.)

Then began a struggle which alarmed the lady not a little, for the consort of the “brute” was willing to go forward, and at every stroke that fell upon him, his companion made a plunge, thinking that it was intended for her, and at each plunge Toby made a corresponding motion to keep himself in position, and set his legs more firmly to resist the powers who were striving to drag him below.

Was that an oath that Mrs. Lepell fancied she heard upon his lordship’s lips? “I think I had better get out,” she said, timorously. “I do, indeed.”

“Do as you like, ma’am,” said he, rather ex-

cited by his struggle. "I won't be beaten by any brute, man, woman, or animal. Stay where you are, I recommend you. I'll just get a stake out of the hedge here that'll make him go, I promise you. You hold these."

He jumped out and put the reins into her hands. She was alarmed but said nothing. Lord John walked on, stamping with cold and vexation, for the hedge was but ill-stocked with suitable stakes; but there was a cottage a little way on, and he should find something that would do there. In a second Toby had looked back over his shoulder, saw that his enemy was gone, and being a "low" fellow, shabby, and with the bad plebeian "drop" in him, thought he would take advantage of a lady and escape. In another moment he had given up struggling against the underground powers, had tossed his head, flung up his heels, to the speechless consternation of the poor lady, and, with some secret understanding with his companion, had started at full speed.

The road was narrow. It was more a "green lane" than a road; about wide enough for a

single cart. His lordship was about twenty yards in front. He turned and saw the sleigh coming furiously down on him. There was hardly a second to prepare or devise a plan; but still, with presence of mind, he had time to throw himself into the ditch against the hedge, and let the sleigh and its unhappy freight dash by.

(His lordship often told the story afterwards, in Paris and to Frenchmen, but always substituting a gentleman as the tenant of the sleigh: "By G—d, my presence of mind saved me. It shaved me as close as this table. Luckily I had my wits about me, or I shouldn't be telling you the story or drinking this cognac of yours, *mon cher.*")

Our poor Mrs. Lepell, what nerves could there be left to her if a fresh accident was to be in store for her every day? Her rosy cheek seemed almost ghastly to the cottager as she flew by him, the sleigh bounding and tossing in the air as if it were of indiarubber. She did not let go the reins—not from presence of mind, poor woman,

but merely because they happened to be *in* her hand. Toby, the "brute," was as "mad as any hatter," and was really enjoying his furious race. The cottager, looking after them, scratched his head doubtfully, and said "It wur a bad job."

So it was, or would have been, but for a gentleman who was coming down the narrow road. He, too, had plenty of presence of mind, and would have plenty of time to get over the hedge into the field, and let the dangerous vehicle go safely by. The road here got even narrower, and when cart met cart, one had to go back, at a great inconvenience, which led to angry passions on the part of the carters. But the behaviour of the gentleman was different; he stood in the middle of the road, shouting and tossing his arms wildly, even jumping into the air—all which behaviour was meant to scare Toby. For a little behind him the road turned sharply, and here directly in front, was that pond which Mrs. Lepell was so anxious to see, as being the point from which was the very best view of the house.

Toby did not in the least heed this protest,

but came on as if he were cavalry making a charge. Then the gentleman, with extraordinary dexterity, jumped aside lightly, as if *he* were a matador at a bull fight, and let Toby pass him for a second, in another second had caught Toby's bridle, but in a third had lost his footing, and was being dragged along almost on his back, hanging to Toby's rein. The screams of the lady were now piteous, for the weight at his head had dragged Toby out of the straight course, and it seemed that the sleigh was about being overset. But luckily this getting out of the straight course drew Toby himself into the hedge, and the whole was now stopped, a mixed mass—hedge, Jenny, Toby and companion, and the gentleman somewhere underneath. But in a moment he had struggled to his feet, a little confused, and was feeling his arm. Mrs. Lepell had recovered, and with presence of mind jumped out.

“Oh, Mr. Severne! Mr. Severne!” she cried, running to him. “You are not hurt?” she asked, in a sort of agony. “Oh, my saviour! my brave, gallant deliverer!” and in the instinct of the

moment she caught his arm tenderly, (the *cloth*, we understand)—and then, with an instinct as sudden, let it go, and stood blushing, terrified, and confused before him.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said, “compose yourself now—are you all right yourself—nothing hurt? I am a little crushed here,” he added, touching his arm, “that brute must have stood on me, I think. Where’s Lord John; was he flung out?”

Here was Lord John, hurrying on from behind to reach the wreck. As he came up he slackened his pace, and looked at them with a sort of defiant self-justification. “It was all that beast’s fault. I couldn’t help it, Mrs. Lepell. You may say what you like; but you know number one——”

She interrupted him eagerly. “Indeed it was not your fault, Lord John. I saw you try and clutch at the rein as it passed; and, oh! Lord John, I was so frightened! I thought you *would be down under the horses’ hoofs.*”

Lord John looked at her inquiringly, and with

a very curious glance ; then said, " Well, I did my best, you know. The fault was in my getting down at all. If I could have just reached the rein ; but I missed it—by, I suppose, a quarter of an inch."

" I saw it, indeed," said the lady. " How you escaped was a miracle. Oh ! Mr. Severne, what shall I say—what shall I do—to my deliverer—*my two deliverers* ? "

Lord John laughed. " That's good. No, no ; I ain't a hero. Our friend there was more in luck. Thank *him*. We must get this thing straight. Here, you fellow"—this was to the cottager—" stir yourself, can't you ? Why didn't you come'up ? I suppose you'd stand by, and see us all killed, before you'd hurry yourself. Don't stand gaping there, you bumpkin, but put your shoulder to it."

Thus rebuked, the rustic set to work to disentangle the mass, under his lordship's direction. " Loose that rein first, stupid ! Don't you see a buckle there ? D'ye want to break the horse's leg—do you ? Here, let me. I

believe you don't care if you smash the whole thing," &c.

The lady's soft eyes were on Severne, and there was real feeling in her voice—"I don't know what to say to you—your bravery, your nobleness, and gallantry. Only for you I might be insensible at this moment, or lying at the bottom of that pond. Not so much matter, you will say. After all, it *is* a little hard—like a persecution; yesterday one escape from death, to-day another. Who knows what to-morrow may bring?"

There was something piteous in this complaint. It did seem a little more than just measure that this poor lady should be pursued with accidents. He spoke to her softly and kindly. "I am very sorry, indeed, very," he said; "and very glad I came up so opportunely. Here, take my arm. No wonder you are flurried. We shall have to walk some way. Or stay; let us look at this. You must have frightened these horses, Lord John?"

"Not I," said his lordship; "it's this infernal

savage system of driving. Who ever heard of such a thing? Does well enough in Russia."

"And does well enough here," said Severne, "if it gets fair play. Steady, Toby. Poor old boy! Come up. Good fellow. That's it. I tell you what, it's two miles to the house, and very rough walking; so what do you say, Mrs. Lepell—will you try again, and trust me?"

She turned pale, and shrank back. Lord John laughed. "Not she, indeed. Burnt child, you know. I don't blame her."

"I'll take you back; yes," said Severne, patting the horses, "as if we were going over the lawn. No? Well, then, you and Lord John must walk part of the way, and take care of each other, and I'll send the carriage."

"But you won't go yourself," said Mrs. Lepell, in great terror. "Those dreadful horses! No; you must not."

"Foolhardy, my friend," said Lord John, taking out a cigar case.

"Then I'll change my mind," said she; "I'll

go. I should like it; nothing shall prevent me. I am not in the least afraid."

"I was only joking," said Severne, a little surprised. "You had better go with Lord John. You had, indeed."

But Mrs. Lepell was excited. "I shall have my own way," she said. "Forgive me for being so positive. I want to redeem my character, and show you that I am not such a *dreadful* coward."

"Well, with all my heart," said he, looking mystified. "I don't quite follow. I don't think there is much danger; but still——"

She had got in. "No room for you, Lord John," he said.

"No one can turn me out now," she said, looking round and smiling. "As for Lord John, he has run sufficient risk already. I would not hear of *him*."

"Now then," said Severne. "Good Toby! Good Toby! Get along. That's it."

And Toby, after a moment's hesitation, and a sudden impulse to launch out as he had done

before, thought better of it, and assuming a more sober carriage, began to canter along swiftly, with the sleigh grinding on musically behind.

CHAPTER IX.

PLANS FOR THE NIGHT.

LORD JOHN walked on by himself. After three quarters of an hour he got to the house, and as he crossed the hall, he saw Mrs. Lepell flitting down the other end. She stopped when she saw him, and ran to him. "I have a favour to ask," she said, "a little favour. Not to make any fuss about our little adventure to-day. It will come on me—on poor me; and they will laugh at my ill-luck, you know. *You* understand that view, Lord John—yesterday in the railway, to-day in the sleigh. Mr. Severne agrees with me, too."

Now, Lord John coming home had been turning the thing over very impatiently. "They will be examining and cross-examining—and why

this and why that ? I should like to know am I to have my bones broken for a creature I only met yesterday ? Catch me at it, indeed ! ” Now he entertained much more favourable views of the creature he met only yesterday. “ Anything you like,” he said, “ I am willing, God knows. I think, too, Sir John wouldn’t be pleased to hear Toby behaved so badly.”

“ Exactly,” said she. “ Though, indeed, we ought not to pass over your behaviour, Lord John, and your bravery in trying to save me.”

He looked at her suspiciously. “ To save you. How ? ”

“ Ah ! I saw what you did, Lord John, as we flew past, though there were a hundred things dancing before my poor eyes. Did you grasp at the reins of that wild creature, and did you not fall back exhausted, and *in peril of your life* ? ” added Mrs. Lepell, slowly, and putting her hand to her forehead, “ *or was it all a dream* ? You won’t admit that ! I must run away now, though. They are planning something for the evening, and oh ! Lord John,” she added, coming back,

“you will be glad to hear *he is mending every hour—every moment.*”

She was gone, and Lord John looked after her with more wonder than was ever seen in his face. “She beats little Tourlou,” he said. (This was a reference to some passage in his lordship’s past life.)

Mr. Canby did not cultivate skating, and had said early in the day that “he could not see what was in it.” Of course, “if you liked sticking your legs here and your legs there, and going along like a postman,” it was all right. In this view the Misses Fenton cordially concurred. Skating, therefore, with them became a pastime that degraded the human mind, to be classed with drinking. “By the way,” said he to the two young ladies, “where is she—the woman out of the accident? I was greatly taken with her last night. I was indeed.”

“I saw you were,” said the younger, taking a bold line. “She is something in your style, Mr. Canby?”

Mr. Canby looked up to the ceiling, as if he

was searching for the style there. "I declare yes," he said, "she is, more or less, you know. I admire that sort of sparkle. Oh, a clever married lady, there's nothing like it. If ever I was to marry, ha, ha—you laugh at the notion—I'd like to marry a clever married lady. But that wouldn't be allowed, you know—against the laws!"

The sisters were ruefully amused at this notion. Encouraged, the gentleman went on—

"'Pon my word, I am serious! You know, about girls there's a kind of a nursery business—want training and wisdom. I like wisdom. Oh no, I should never dream of marrying a girl. A widow, perhaps—though there are objections *there*. Money could get over a good deal. Well now," said he, dismissing the subject wearily, "what's this about to-night? Plays and that sort of thing! But who's to do it? you know. Have you got a programme made out?"

"The very thing!" they both said together, for they had trained their ideas to move in com-

mon, and the sudden force and unanimity of the two sisters was often found to produce a good and startling effect. "We wanted to talk it over. It will be such a surprise. No one is to know anything about it except Sir John and the actors."

"That's all very well, now," said Mr. Canby, full of "common sense;" "that's all very well; but you should have a programme. As for going on without a programme, we might all be as well at sea!"

It all burst with a flash on the elder sister. She had never thought of that. No one would ever have thought of it, had not Mr. Canby been providentially there and suggested it. "We forgot that," she said despondingly, "but there may be time yet to have them printed."

The younger sister saw the error; but Canby struck in first with "common sense."

"Printing!" he said, "what would you print? Of course, if any one likes it, gratify 'em by all means!" The two sisters laughed in happy concert until that periodical "dying" came on

and the subsequent happy resuscitation. Their laughter was so hearty and genuine, the young ladies holding on by the chair and the wainscot, and suffering so acutely, that his features relaxed. "You know it seemed so absurd," he said, good humouredly. "A 'programme isn't the thing a fellow gives you at a concert, and for which you give *him* a shilling. You should have a plan of action—know where you are—like the fellows in Parliament. When a minister comes in, you know, he has to make out a line of business in his head, and tell his fellows, or they won't stick by him, you see. *That's* a programme."

The sisters followed this professorial explanation with wonder, and looked at each other with speechless delight, as if the Philosopher's stone had been suddenly revealed, or rather, as other ordinary persons would have looked on such a communication; for, to say the truth, the sisters had no great interest in the grand *arcana* of Nature; and would have received the polarisation of light, the new metal, the electric tele-

graph, &c., with no surprise, and only a pleasant smile. They then fell to talking on the project for the night, into which Mr. Canby entered graciously, and with more alacrity.

The sisters were clever in their way, and had already in their room settled a "programme" of their operations. They, indeed, had arranged it all diligently in their rooms; had in fact some "stock" charades, which they carried about with them from house to house, having the "business" well in their minds, and being ready to "mount" them at an hour's notice.

"Flirtin' would be a good word," said Mr. Canby, reflectively. "A lady and gent, you know, going on in a room, saying the regular thing, and then some one would come and ring a bell, and away they'd cut, alarmed, you know, afraid of being caught."

The two sisters screamed with delight: Flirt-ting-ting-ting of the bell, don't you see? It was so new and so original. Well, yes, it was. He had lain awake half the night at the barracks making it out, but it was well worth it. Still in

their secret hearts the sisters were embarrassed, because, to say the truth, the word was defective. The reader will see that a certain violence would have to be used to carry out Mr. Canby's view, and get the two words out of "Flirting," to say nothing of the "whole" being the same as the first word. Yet the young ladies seemed to be indulgent enough to pass by these little defects, and accept it for all and all.

"There now," said Mr. Canby, "you work it between you. I have started you, you see, and shall go and have a pipe."

When he had gone they looked at each other with contempt.

"What a ridiculous, nonsensical notion! He'll spoil everything. Why it's no word at all."

"Then why did you take it up so greedily?" said her sister. "I shan't stand up to be made a fool of acting such nonsense—ting-ting, indeed!"

Severne now came up.

"What's this you have planning?" he said. "I hear you are going to entertain us to-night—how good-natured of you."

“No, indeed,” they said together; “only a notion of Mr. Canby’s.”

“Oh, has *he* a hand in it! Poor Canby! Then it will be great fun; make him come forward.”

“But you must help, indeed you must; and Captain Philips, and Mr. Selby, and everybody.”

“Nonsense,” said Severne, “we are all mere country rustics. You are well trained, and will show us how to do it properly. The carpenter is at work already, and at your orders; a very smart fellow, and will do whatever you tell him. By the way, I’ll tell you now—engage that Mrs. Lepell, she’s clever and a half, I can tell you, and will act like a professional.”

“Oh, Oh, Mr. Severne!” the two young ladies broke out, with that almost supernatural *entente* which has mystified us so much before; “how *wicked* of you! How *shamefully wicked*!”

“How? No, not I,” he said, calmly. “Shameful! wicked! what odd words! Canby can be wicked in that way. I mean merely the plain, practical sense of the thing. I’ll stake my reputation—which is not much, however—and my

judgment—if I have any—that she has great powers, and you could not do better than secure her."

But the sisters did not receive this proposal with alacrity.

"We could hardly, *I think*," said one. "You know, her husband—it would be unfeeling."

Now came up Selby. "I hear of a surprise for to-night. Mum's the word; but I only hope it's true."

"All right, Selby," said his friend, "and we owe it all to these young ladies—manageresses and everything, who have planned it all sitting at home here, while we, selfish beasts, have been amusing ourselves."

"Oh, I am so glad!" said Selby, with immense animation; "and I'll tell you what I was thinking of as I came along the gallery—what will carry the thing off and bring down the House—"

"Oh tell us, Mr. Selby," said the two girls, smiling and delighted.

He looked round mysteriously, and with a little shyness said—"Get that clever Mrs. Lepell

to do something. She will carry it all through for you. I know she can act."

"There! What did I tell you?" said Severne. "General opinion seems to run that way."

A curious expression came into the faces of the two Servants of Society, as we may without disrespect call them. For a moment their discipline gave way. "Mrs. Lepell seems to be everything now," said one.

"Well, she *is* clever," said Severne, gravely. "I would recommend you to secure her. Of course if you want the thing to fall through——"

"Yes! and I tell you what," said Selby, very eagerly, "*I'll manage it.* I'll go and find Sir John, and make him ask her. She can't refuse him, you know. I know where he is now," and Selby ran off.

It seems a little hard certainly that these faithful Servants of the World should by some fatality come in always for such rude knocks. For one would think by the tone of the two gentlemen that the girls, instead of trying to contribute a little to the entertainment of the

house, were carrying out some interested scheme of their own. No doubt the faithful Virgins and Martyrs of the World are more than indemnified by secret transports and comforts, of which we have no conception.

But alas ! were there not yet greater trials to come ? Before long they saw the lady, at the end of the long gallery, with *at least four gentlemen* about her, all apparently remonstrating and pressing some request eagerly. One of these was Sir John, and another the "white-livered" Canby. The spectacle was not agreeable, and they turned away. But in a short time Selby was eagerly hunting for them, and, out of breath, came rushing to find them. " You are wanted," he said, brusquely—here were more of the cruel trials of the world—" come quick. She has agreed to do it. We managed it. Come along. There's no time to be lost. We are keeping her waiting." But the sisters, though suffering—they could not have been mortal else—went away with alacrity. Too much capital had, so to speak, been sunk in the officer—he was of the Norfolk Canbys, son



to Sir John Canby, who owned Canby House, and Conservative colleague to Lord Toleper, of Toleper's Barn, and who had his twelve thousand a year "if he had a penny," only one brother, *and no mother living*—to allow it all to be lost through being disheartened.

There was a busy council being held. Mrs. Lepell in a moment had struck out brilliant ideas. She gently put aside Mr. Canby's scheme. "It is very clever, so dreadfully clever," she said, in deep thought, "Oh, *so* clever! But I am afraid, you know.—There are the servants and the tenants, I believe, and *they* will want something that appeals more to *their* sense. Nothing so refined and elegant—something coarser, I fear, will only do." Then in a moment she had mapped out a scheme certainly more practical than Mr. Canby's. That gentleman accepted the withdrawal of his piece with perfect good humour. He seemed to see an intelligence in Mrs. Lepell's eyes, as who should say, "*Later and privately* I will explain the greater reasons."

On that night the table was very full. Sir John had asked a dinner party, and a very large one, of squires and their wives; good "sound" men, who would "stand by the ship,"—at least in the sense of what he defined standing by the ship.—"Though, God knows," said Sir John, "the poor ship is in a pretty way!"

There was a clergyman, a doctor, and some young men whose profession was hunting or cattle, and who delighted in the companionship of the beasts of the field.

Sir John went up to talk with poor Jack Lepell's cousin just before dinner—arrayed in his best high-collared "skimpy" gilt-buttoned coat (same as in the picture painted for the old anti-Reform Association, temp. 1830, by Skrine, R.S.A., then much in fashion for political portraits).

"My dear fellow," he said, "how are you? I wish to God you were up, and could come down; it would do your heart good to see the men I could show you at my table to-day—real '88 men—the bone and sinew, sir—men of the

stamp that got us *Habeas Corpus* and *Magna Charta*, and went down to Torbay, sir, to meet their King. But a few left, sir, now—only a few. There's not encouragement to be loyal. Well, how are you getting on?"

But Mr. Lepell was not well enough to stir, even for this view of his moral interests. He was, indeed, a little feebler than in the morning, being tired out with the day.

"Well, well, perhaps it is better," said Sir John. "We'll send you something. The *John Bull* ought to be in now. Ah! They know how to write in *that* paper. There was an article, let me see, yesterday or the day before, called 'The Whig Murrain,' as well done as Junius, every bit; I'll get it from Duncan. He devours it, and to tell you the truth I encourage it among *them* and subscribe for another copy for the servants' hall. It keeps up a good, pure, moral tone among 'em. Yes, I'll tell Duncan. There's to be some sport to-night. I gave 'em the use of the carpenters, and, egad, they've put up a stage-play-house thing. Goodness! it makes

me think of poor Perceval, as true and pure a man as ever stepped, whom those vile Whigs got shot in the lobby. Not two years before he died he had some of these stage plays at his house (read his Bible, though, twice a day). Your wife, I hear, is wonderful at them. I can tell you I begin to like her, for she is sound wind, limb, and body—all the women, sir, are forced to be the other way now-a-days to get a husband at all—all them low, wandering Whigs, without an acre, except what they'll just get to bury them, and too good for them," &c.

Thus did the baronet ramble on, as he always did when this subject seized on him. Mr. Lepell, ill and weary, listened patiently and with what appeared to be devotion.

CHAPTER X.

THE DINNER PARTY.

Down in the drawing-room the guests were coming in. The Bonds, of Bond Hall; Claymore, of Bushmills; Charley Ridge; Sir Thomas Hall, of Stonehall; Rev. Mr. Bush, &c., &c., &c. There were a great many, and besides, that “bone and sinew” class to which Sir John had alluded, to whom we were indebted for the *Habeas Corpus*, landing at Torbay, &c., and amongst whom were to be found the saviours of the country. Sir Thomas Hall, of Stonehall, who was to be chief saviour, and whose ancestor had been on the shingles at Torbay, from his appearance, seemed hardly up to the physical standard—being a small, red-faced, cheerful gentleman, with a red bald head, and two flat brushes of hair on each side, like the winkers of a horse, or as one

of the facetious young jesters of the party likened them to, the two tufts on each side of the clown's head in a pantomime.

They sat down "positively two and thirty strong," in the large hall. Captain Philips took in a clergyman's wife, whom he very soon found out to be a thrifty, housekeeping woman, and who had all need, poor soul, for such gifts, having some seven or eight children to housekeep for. Still her delight was in making "good things," and "our clotted cream, you know, Captain Philips, has a regular name about here. We send it over to Sir John here regularly at Christmas and Easter, with currant jelly and marmalade." Captain Philips, who had been letting "the woman talk on," as he said, ("always my way,") now pricked up his ears, and turned from his plate to look at her.

"Oh, that was *yours*, was it?" he said; "uncommon good, I can tell you, if you could get enough of it. The women here at breakfast are so greedy, there is no getting a chance. The marmalade was really fair, had flavour, and not

too thick or greasy. The Scotch, I am told, thicken it with lard—only fancy ! ”

The clergyman’s wife’s cheeks glowed with pleasure.

“ I am so glad you liked it. If you were at all near us, I am sure we should be delighted to—— ”

“ Well, I am,” said the other,—“ quartered in the town, you know. I have a house there Mrs. Philips and the children ; a low, beastly den, for which, of course, we have to pay double for what we would do in Town. If you would, I should really be much obliged to you. A few pots, you know.”

“ Oh, the moment I get back,” said the lady, eagerly, “ I’ll make up a little hamper.”

“ Just a few pots, you know—no, by the way, better make two parcels, you know. The cream might catch the taste of the other—it does, somehow. It’s very kind indeed of you. I’ll send over my man.”

“ No trouble, I assure you,” said the lady, more delighted. “ We can put it in the gig—he passes the door, you know.”

"No, better say my man," said Captain Philips, firmly. "I'll lay it out *that way*." He afterwards said, truly enough, that he saw what the woman was at. "Mrs. Philips, you know—too old a soldier to be brought into an acquaintance with a parson's wife for a pot of jam."

Sir Thomas Hall, of Stonehall, was fluently talking at the end of the table, illustrating his talk with great gesticulations. He was very pleasant and fluent, and laughing cordially in every sentence he delivered. He liked his joke, and could joke even on sacred subjects—*i.e.* Conservatism, &c.

"I am always open to the mess of pottage, you know," he said. "When a man gives that out without disguise there is no harm in it; and yet they have never tried to corrupt me. I suppose if they had I should have done like every other man they have tried to corrupt. Hey, Sir John?"

Sir John knew he was "sound in wind and limb;" "right to the back bone;" "would stand by the poor old ship;" so he could have every indulgence for these sportive sallies.

Sir Thomas Hall went on, in the same strain —“Every man has his price, you know; not in money down, my dear Sir John, or in a cheque on Coutts; but there is something that will buy us all, you know. For instance, Sir John, there —if they repealed that thing of twenty-nine, and passed an Act that no Whig should ever hold office—that might be Sir John’s price.”

Sir John laughed. “Ah! my dear friend. They hounded on the mob to shoot poor Perceval, a pure man, that served his Sovereign,” &c.

There was a sort of coterie near the top of the table. Lady Hall, of Stonehall, was next Sir John; Mrs. Severne, Severne himself, Lord John, Mrs. Lepell, and that good-natured friend of Severne’s, who was actually next to her.

Mrs. Lepell had changed wonderfully within a day. She was no longer timorous and shrinking, as some of the ladies would have put it (modest, her friends would have called it), but could take her place “firmly, like the wife of Jack Lepell’s cousin.”

She was getting on in the house. She was

telling her adventure of the day; but presently Severne began to cross-examine:

“It was a wonderful escape,” he said, looking round: “I know I performed prodigies; and must write up and claim the Humane Society’s medal. Such dashing gallantry—such splendid chivalry should get *something*. But Lord John, let us hear how does *he* come in? because *he* did his part too, you know, or tried to—did *he* not?”

“Oh, bless your soul, leave me out of it,” said Lord John, a little disturbed. “I claim nothing, recollect.”

“No—I know that,” said Severne, “but from mere curiosity. Seriously, I want to know how it took place? Who frightened the horse?”

“I didn’t, I’ll swear,” said Lord John. “All I know is, I did my best to stop him. Some fellows, my boy, get into a better line for that sort of thing. I was pulling a stake out of the hedge at the time; and it was well the pole didn’t drive right through my back.”

“Lord John did all that a brave gentleman

could do," said Mrs. Lepell in her calm, quiet, almost reproving tone. Then she went on, as it were, with a narrative. "He got down to try and do something with the horses. There was a switch in the hedge——"

"Then God bless me," said Sir John, "where was the whip?"

"The whip was of no use," said she, "Sir John. We had tried everything with the horses. The question was, were they to master Lord John, or he them? He was actually pulling a switch out, which at the moment I really thought had been put there by Providence, when the horses gave a plunge, and oh"—Mrs. Lepell covered her eyes a moment.

"Quite an adventure," said Sir Thomas Hall; "how dreadful!"

"I assure you, Sir Thomas Hall," she continued, turning to *him*, "the carriage flew past Lord John as close as that glass is to *that*. You could not have put a sheet of paper between. My eyes seemed to swim; I thought I should have fainted; but, Lord John, I must tell this in spite

of all your looks and nods, and cautions, as I say though there was a mist before my eyes, I saw an arm strike out wildly at the reins—and—”

“Pooh, pooh,” said Lord John, heartily; “nonsense. It was self-defence. I was frightened out of a year’s growth. I’ll never get to my full size, and you are the cause, Mrs. L., and no one else.”

“Ah! you may laugh, Lord John,” she said, excitedly, “you may, indeed, and make little of it, and I know to save a poor weak woman from a horrible death, is only a trifle, but *I* think it no trifle, and never shall. You would have passed it over, and not said a word about it; but I could not in conscience.”

“Ah, stop, madam,” said his lordship, “you are making my virgin cheeks blush.”

Severne was looking on with great amusement, and yet with a little pique.

“Why, it seems it is Lord John should get the medal after all—not I; quite right too. *He* is a Preserver also.”

Lord John laughed loudly.

“There’s a fix for you, Mrs. L. Egad, yes, it

comes to that ; and nothing for the fellow that really saved her. Oh, uncommon good ! ”

Mrs. Lepell looked down on her plate sadly ; she stole a look of reproach at Lord John, but said nothing. Suddenly Selby broke in with great warmth—

“ I understood,” he said, “ I followed quite. Never mind, Mrs. Lepell, I know what you mean as well as if I was there. None of us here understand you, except—except—.” He stopped and coloured.

“ Except you ! Well done, my Knight,” said Lord John ; “ spoken out like a man. ‘ Pon my word, this is coming out.’ ”

They all laughed ; even Mrs. Lepell *could not but smile* at such advocacy, which only made her ridiculous to *a certain degree*, as we can all understand. But the result was, this honest fellow was overwhelmed with confusion. After, all the best-intentioned of the community ; even the righteous by profession, resent this indiscreet advocacy and panegyric, and reasonably, because it frustrates its own ends, and makes the object

a little ridiculous. Thus the dinner passed on, and Sir John took up politics, and Sir Thomas Hall, dismissing his bantering manner, began to talk of "the county," and then of the "election."

The country gentlemen then became very wise and eager.

"As for young Groper," said Sir Thomas, "he be hanged. What does the old lord mean forcing his lad on us? Does he think he has got one of his rotten boroughs here, to stuff one of his relations into?"

"I tell *you* what," said Sir John; "I found out old Groper ten years ago! He's a mere shopman, sir—would sell you and me, sir, and the party, over his counter. He's all things to all men. He's unsound, sir, wind and limb—a mere discounter in politics."

"I suspected that, do you know," said Sir Thomas; "but I think we can guess where to light on the right man for the right place," and he looked round meaningly at Severne. "Unfurl the blue flag, rally your true men, Sir John."

"Save England, sir," said Sir John; "nail

our colours to the mast, and no surrender, and I don't care who you put in."

"Ah!" said Sir Thomas; "that's the tune. There can be no mistake in *this* house. We know the sort of article that can be got here, the true sample, sir, and of the right stuff. My dear Sir John, we will bring him in, in a canter. Eh, Severne?"

Sir John looked delighted. All turned to Severne as if expecting a rapturous profession of faith, in reference to *his* nailing something to that wonderful mast which by this time must be almost "honeycombed," with the holes of nails that have been driven in, and invisible from the shreds of old bunting. But Severne only laughed.

"I'll make a very poor hand of it. I haven't energy to fight for the poor old Constitution. I don't know how to stop the leaks. I don't see any mast. You'd better have young Groper."

"How modest we are," said Lord John, sneeringly. "I declare it's charming."

"The true Blue is always modest," said Sir

John ; "wait until you hear him on the hustings. He'll give you doctrine. Come, my lad, speak out. Good sound stuff, sir, the real old port."

"Ah, if he could give us *that*," said Lord John ; "it would be worth all the politics ever bottled or unbottled. Eh, Mrs. Lepell ? Sir John says *you* are a rank Tory. I don't believe it ; and as to Severne, there, why I'll wait till we get him on the hustings ; and until he prints his address. I doubt," he added, in a low voice, "if he'll turn out quite as blue as we all think. Our friend wasn't born during the Flood. I should say he'd go with the young hounds, and run a regular buck on 'em. However, that's their look out, not mine. I must give him my vote any way, for I owe Groper a grudge, an impudent, upsetting beggar, and as greedy as a pike. Egad, Mrs. L., you'll canvas for us. I'm going to start myself one of these days. At this moment I

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knows his place, and sticks to his mills, and don't go buying land, and trying to become a gentleman. No, I can distinguish." And Sir John *did* distinguish with great warmth; but at this moment, Mr. Hubbard, the "milling scoundrel," stimulated, it must be said, by Mrs. Hubbard, who was yearning to become "a lady," had actually given orders to a London agent to keep an eye out for an eligible thing, in the way of an estate, about a hundred and twenty thousand or so.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHARADES.

IN the drawing-room they found a very great company assembled. Those who were to play had flitted off to get ready dresses, &c. But those active organizers, the Misses Fenton, well trained to such offices, had left the dinner-table early to get properties and dresses, and had worked promptly and efficiently; so that every one found in his or her room what was required, neatly folded up and ready. Now that *business* had asserted its claims, they showed all the virtues of steady industry, forethought, and diligence. Every one was astonished, everything was provided, and even the sisters' needles had been at work, sewing on frillings and furbelows.

The barrister who practised at country houses had been found invaluable: and showed a pro-

found acquaintance with at least this branch of The Bar. He showed himself indefatigable, and had co-operated with the Misses Fenton in a very hearty and skilful way. At last word was brought, very mysteriously, to Sir John, that all things were now ready, and the curtain about to rise, and there was a mysterious flutter round the room. It was time to begin.

“Hah, indeed,” said Sir John; “very good, then; I suppose we had better move on.”

He then told this news, and went round the company, and the agricultural ladies and gentlemen gathered together, with a strange flutter and eagerness. They had but a dreamy idea of what manner of entertainment this might turn out to be.

Sir John’s carpenters had indeed done wonders. They had taken much delight in the office; and one, a “handy man,” prided himself specially upon the skill with which he had constructed a real curtain, that went up and down on true theatrical principle. All through the night this handy man kept his eyes upon his

work, superintended its going up and down with delight, and at the close joined respectfully in the general felicitation on the success of the whole, saying that "there hadn't been a single hitch," meaning to refer to his curtain. Chairs had been set in front in rows; chairs certainly a little irregular in symmetry; for even the high-backed Cattermole chairs had been brought in out of the outer hall.

Sir John Digby and Lady Hall, and the other distinguished Conservatives, sat in front. Behind, the servants, the steward, the more comfortable of the labourers, and the keepers, crowded in. Captain Philips and another gentleman—a young fellow going into the army—were not present. The former had surveyed all the company filing off, with unconcealed mistrust and dislike—then said to Lord John—

"I say, you going with the rest, to see the children?"

"Egad I am," said Lord John; "I wouldn't miss it. The women are going to dance and show off, my boy; and our sick friend's wife too

—poor devil. She may come out in tights on us, my lad, for all you or I know."

"O, that's the way, is it?" said the other, with more disgust. "Take care you're not roaring with that lumbago in the morning—at your age, you know. I was thinking of a quiet game with the balls, while they were at their foolery, and a snug cigar, with something warm, you know."

"All very good," said Lord John; "but won't do at present, you see. I've travelled, my friend, and got up in the morning, and paid for my schooling, eh!" and Lord John fell into a series of intelligent contortions. "You follow, eh?"

"Indeed I do not," said Captain Philips, turning away.

He then caught the young gentleman, whom he addressed with a sort of cold command.

"I suppose you'll go and look on at their grown-up tumblers, eh! I am going to have a game, quietly, with a cigar. Don't *you* be a fool—stay, if you like."

He was in great awe of Captain Philips, and

his knowledge of the world; and though dying to see the "show," yet wished to show that he was not quite ignorant of the world. He remained, played, was treated injuriously by his companion, who was free and sarcastic on him, and when he had no further occasion for his services, after the game was done, sat down to enjoy his cigar, and declined to fatigue himself talking to "a young cur" of that sort, as he afterwards happily described him.

At the extemporised stage it was wonderful how much had been "got up" in the time. The young barrister—Mr. Weeder—who was "in such business at country houses," had done much and had taken a great burden on himself. A bell was heard to ring behind, the curtain was drawn aside, and he came out in front to speak a Prologue.

"Such a clever thing," every one said afterwards, "and—would you believe it?—he just sat at a side-table, and knocked it off in about ten minutes. It would have made you die with laughter," people said later, telling the story to

their friends, “ and all impromptu, you know, not a line of it thought of before three o'clock, and then he just sat down at a side-table, and knocked it off.” And yet, if the truth must be told, it was not such a feat in our barrister—if we consider that he took about with him on his “circuit” at country houses, a sort of “common form,” for these sort of things, just as other lawyers take about “Davidson's Precedents,” and a very little adaptation made it fit all occasions excellently. He came out in a grotesque dress, began with a shy start of surprise, which threw everybody into convulsions of laughter :—

“ Lord, what a crowd ! I'm really quite alarmed,
Inclined to run away—yet no—I'm charmed !
Such grace, such beauty, must all fears dispel ;
Remove all doubt, and makes me feel—*quite well!*”

(These last words spoken with infinite roguishness, which provoked a titter.)

“ But what's the play to-night ? Macbeth ? Well, well, well !
Tell, then, you ask—*Not surely William Tell ?*”

(A roar of laughter, which obliges the humourist to stop ; but he is all the while looking on with

good-humoured toleration. He goes on, when order is restored, in the same pleasant and animated way.)

“And what’s the sport?—a farce—a comedy?
A sol—emn tra—ge—dy?

(Here the hollow cavernous tone of the speaker caused fresh amusement).

“Once more *do* try!

Some like a speech—some like the charming Bards;
Some like *hard chairs*, and others like *chairhards*.”

There was a moment’s hesitation; the speaker paused with a look of intense amusement; but he *knew* it would come, as he told them behind the curtain. “I let ‘em take their time, and they got it at last.” So they did, for some one said, in a delighted whisper, “Chair hard, Hard chair! don’t you see?” and the burst of comprehension spread like an Atlantic wave over the room. It had to be explained, however, laboriously to the country gentlemen.

“Uncommonly good, that, you know; a very clever young fellow from circuit, and said one of the best things I ever heard—the difference between a hard chair and char-ade. Real wit, sir.”

These lines had strictly followed the Common Form, and had been delivered to many audiences in many country houses. But presently came a little change—a slight variation, which might still be considered a common form:—

“Who are our actors? fairly will you ask,
With whom you now attempt your arduous task;
Ah, ladies fair, behind this curtain guess,
We really have *embarras de Richesses*.
And one great aid we surely must have leant on,
Those fascinating stars, the Misses Fenton.

(*A roar.*)

Nor must I pass her by, the fair Lepell,
Whom we may fairly call—a *railway belle*.”

(*Another roar.*)

And most natural one. For every one had been talking of the accident, and had heard of the happy escape of the lady.

“Uncommonly good that,” the country gentlemen said. “You heard, didn’t you—the bell, you know, of the railway station? A clever young fellow as ever I met, you know.”

“So with the rest: and say what must that man be,
Who would not be content with—martial Canby.
But, oh, our bliss would be complete from stem to stern,
Could we bring here that charming stream, *Severne!*”

And the knowing fellow looked gallantly among

the audience for the lady alluded to. The house “came down.” He then concluded with these two happy lines:—

“Now burnt to ashes may my horse-hair wig be,
All luck attend our brave old host of Digby!”

This was touching the true chord. Every one understood *that*, and something like a cheer arose for the sentiment. Sir John was pleased. “He has great talents,” he said to his neighbour; “shouldn’t be surprised if he were a judge one of these days. His great uncle, ma’am, was a baron of the Court of Exchequer, and though as great a Tory as ever stepped, the Whigs *had* to put him in. They positively couldn’t get a decent fellow out of their own gang. A very fair young fellow indeed, and with good principles, and I hope he will do well.”

Hush! The curtain is going up. Loud applause, and richly deserved—for here is a room, a regular room, with a bar in the centre, contrived cleverly by two Indian folding screens, and with a barmaid *in* the bar, looking out as if through a window, and a porter machine, with

handles for "pulling," glasses, bottles, everything complete; and a sign, painted cleverly on a bit of old newspaper—

THE
DIGBY ARMS.

This one touch—due to Miss Fenton, it must be said—made the whole world there akin. Every one knew that hostelry, and this counterfeit presentment seemed to embody the relations of employer and employed—a kind landlord, good and faithful tenants. Every one, as they applauded, were affected, except of course Lord John, who said, "Egad, I never saw a Sign *inside* a Public before." But the barmaid's cap, ribbons, apron, everything was charming. Separate applause for Miss Canby, the younger, as she came out of her bar. Perfectly at home, never at a loss for a word, she tossed her head, and told her little story.

Sairy the barmaid.—"Lord, I am sure the

Digby Arms never was so full before. Folks will come during the race-week, and fuss a body so, one loses one's little wits quite. Lord, a deary me, what am I to do, and where am I to put the folks? Here's a letter from Lord Timbertoes, two rooms. Lady Snuffle Buffle (this comic name was coined, invented, and patented by the clever young barrister—'only think, *just* as we were going on'), Mr. and Mrs. Manjack, two rooms—and here, I declare, yes, a note from Sir John, wanting two himself. Bless his dear 'art,' added the charming barmaid, kissing the letter, and simulating a Cockney accent, "the 'ole set shall pack out, every one on 'em, bag and baggage, afore I'd bring myself to disappoint that dear good Sir John Digby."

Need we say that the performance had to be suspended, to give an opening for the burst of applause at this happy allusion. The tenants at the distance, who understood the Sign-board and the Bar, thoroughly, thundered an agricultural applause with a "the'er be t'ould Sir John! Hooray!" No real live barmaid, it was pro-

nounced, could do the thing better ; and above all, no one enjoying the young lady's intimacy in domestic life, could believe that she had this gay vein undeveloped beneath.

But what was this to the next incident, when the lively barrister, with a real apron on, and an old blue jacket, which he had actually gone down to the town to borrow—for “Realism” is the soul of these things—and a genuine strap of pewter pots on his back, came pattering in with the brisk walk of a waiter, and with a smart “Coming! coming, sir!”—proceeded to draw the beer—*real* beer, mind you—and contrived to get a good “head” on the pewter pot, which he held with infinite dexterity, and without spilling a drop.

Barmaid.—“Well, William, any signs of the company? Lawk! how I am worried.”

William (wiping his forehead with the corner of his apron, which produces a roar).—“Yes, indeed, marm. I never gets no rest now at all. Have to sleep, marm, *in* the tap. (*Roar again*). Hope, marm, Sir John be coming? A kindly, civil-spoken gentleman, marm. That I do hopes,

marm, they'll make a nobleman of one of these days, and no man deserves it better."—(*Fresh applause.*)

Then the bells begin to ring, and all behind to stamp and shout, a token of carriages and company arriving; and really words could not describe the capital picture of ludicrous confusion into which the two servants were thrown. They went backwards and forwards, flying to this side and that, running to the right and to the left; rushing up against each other, answering with a sort of competition, "Here, sir!" "Yes, marm!" until after ten minutes or so, when the barmaid was leaning faint and exhausted, with her hand on her waist against the wall, and the waiter, in his hurry, had purposely tripped, and tumbled down flat, human nature could not resist any longer, and the house rose at them. "Talk of Liston and Munden," said an old country gentleman, with his golden glasses in his hands, "I saw 'em, and I assure you that young fellow is very much in their way—uncommon good." Lord John was growling. He was getting thirsty, perhaps. "That's fine acting,

isn't it ?" he said ; " uncommon fine selfishness, too. They are not going to give any one else a chance. We'll be all night here at this rate. What a witty cub that is. Dam 'em, do they mean to get on to-night ?"

Then came in the guests, a motley crowd, made up in the most comic dresses, old white hats, capes, wrappers, and huge mufflers—carrying white bandboxes and paper parcels, like old nurse-tenders' umbrellas, in short, as some one remarked, " dressed exactly as we see the travellers on the railway any day of our lives." All these were vociferating, speaking together, complaining, shouting, expostulating, and making a most amusing Babel of sounds. Several of this class were naturally inclined to distinguish themselves a little, and get a small share of the favour of the audience—a not unreasonable claim ; but such was the enthusiasm, the perfect identification of themselves with their parts that possessed both waiter and barmaid, that they unconsciously, perhaps, absorbed all the dialogue of the little piece. This bore a little hard on one gentleman,

who had been at great pains to get himself up as a travelling old gentleman, with the invariable broad brimmed Quaker's hat and coachman cloak, large stick and spectacles, with which old gentlemen always travel, and who had indeed prepared some capital things.

"It was an infernal shame," this ill-used player said afterwards; "that greedy beast thinks nobody has a tongue but himself. Gabble, gabble. Infernal, so it is. Calling this sort of thing charades. Pooh."

At the proper point the "handy man" let down the curtain, which descended beautifully and without a hitch. The point now was to guess what was it. "Bar, eh? The lawyer, you know. 'Brought up to the bar.' Ha, ha! very good!—uncommon good! Papa, papa! do you know what Mr. Sweetman says?" Mr. Sweetman was the new curate, sly and shy, and demure, and always saying "good things" in his own sly and shy way; Papa was the one who had seen Liston and Munden—"Mr. Sweetman says that it is 'Brought to the Bar.'"

“Brought up,” said Mr. Sweetman, softly.

“My God!” said Lord John, standing up and stretching himself before the whole company, “to think that we are all grown up people here, and supposed to be sensible men and women! —which we are, my dear young creature, of course.”

“I *know* you have guessed it, Lord John,” said the dear young woman. “I am sure of it.”

“Why, must we guess, too?” said he. “They want to put *that* on us, do they? a charade is it? To be sure. Don’t you see? Hotel, hotel —*inn*—there, there, that’s it; that’s the regular word. Bless you, my dear, these creatures have their regular stock-in-trade and fixtures, and something or other. The next word will be mate, or something of that sort. My goodness! talk of the nineteenth century, and here we are, tumbling like children in a nursery!”

Lord John was now getting very dry indeed about the throat, and in a few moments had “slipped out quietly” towards the housekeeper’s room. He used to take Mrs. Hardcastle under

the chin sometimes, in that amazingly free way of his, which is passed over in Lord Johns, and told her she put him in mind of “a devilish fine woman at Mr. Roche’s ten years ago. And let me tell you, my dear creature, I was the man in the place she cared least for—of course I was. Treated me like a dog—eh? Of course she did. My dear child, quick with that brown gruel of yours; I’m scalding down the red lane here. Ah! that’s soft and sugary.”

Though he was away a long time, the curtain had not risen when he came back. “Always the way,” said Lord John. “Bet you a sovereign they are smirking together at this moment, hobnobbing over their drink. ‘Oh, *you* were capital.’ And the other one tells *him*, ‘And *you* were *so* funny—never heard anything better! And how the audience laughed.’ ‘It’s going capitally.’ That’s the word—‘going capitally.’ This is absurd, waiting in this way! I’ll just go and speak to the baronet.” And he actually did; and in a moment a message arrived behind the scenes from Sir John, hoping that they were ready.

Lord John's penetration was wonderful, for they were actually, as he described, telling each other that it was "Going capitally." But they were ready now, and the curtain rose slowly, and showed a study—a little darkened, but laid out with taste. The room of a virtuoso: books, drawings, a picture on an easel, crimson draperies, and a small female statue out of the gallery, at one side. A lamp was burning, and Severne, in a black velvet robe, with a very low collar, and looking specially handsome, was sitting, his hand to his forehead, reading and studying. The courtesy that could grudge this good-looking apparition the cheap tribute of a round of applause, must have been of a poor sort. Something in the management of the lights gave a rich hue to the whole, and made it seem like a picture.

"Egad, that's not so bad," said Lord John to his neighbour; "there's a touch of the what-ye-may-call-it in that;" who or what he alluded to the neighbour did not know, but it is likely that he meant something artistic.

Presently Severne rose, and began in a dreamy

way to talk of something that was past. Then the clock was heard to strike.

Severne.—“Midnight! one more day gone with the rest, yet the end seems as far away as ever; yet it must be coming. O, how I long for the peaceful quiet of the grave! sweet, happy, long expected hour, when I shall rejoin *her*, that dear innocent—the darling long-lost maid—she whom I so cruelly betrayed.” Then he began softly and melodiously a well-known monody. The rustics high and low were impressed by it, and stretched their necks to make out that raven which they were sure was over the bust of Pallas. Indeed the barrister was even eager that some concrete realization of this part of the poem should be carried out.

“The thing won’t go off at all, *Severne*,” he said; “just clap a stuffed bird up there and give him a go of paint, and you’ll see if that doesn’t touch ‘em up; and I tell you what, my boy, we might have a black thread to his wings and not a soul ‘ud see it, and we could make ‘em flap at the proper points. See here:

“ And the Raven said—
‘ Never more.’ ”

Thus flap ! flap ! My goodness ! Why, they'd rise at you ! ” But Severne could not enter into this brilliant picture.

“ They'd only laugh,” he said ; “ it would turn it into a burlesque. No, no, leave it to me and Mrs. Lepell ; you concentrate yourself on the business of the piece.”

He went on : “ What is there for me now ? What remains but misery and agony, and an end too long delayed ? When will it come ?—when will she come ? ”

Suddenly was heard soft and ravishing strains of celestial music—in fact, a very costly harmonium touched by the fingers of one of the Miss Fentons. They had sent up, in a hurried manner, to Mr. Sweetman for a “ book of the anthems, dear Mr. Sweetman ! ” (That clergyman, from the spasmodic and agitated spirit that governs all theatrical manners, thought it was a concern of life and death, and that he was

summoned to attend a sick bed.) And then, before the music had died away, appeared a vision—in a snowy dress—with long hair down on her shoulders, a gold fillet on her forehead, and her arms stretched out, with a smile of most bewitching and forgiving invitation. The rustics—gentle and simple—remarked a sort of haziness, almost spiritual, about this despairing vision—a softness, and at the same time a brilliancy—a mistiness of outline which seemed supernatural, and was certainly wanting in the ruder vision that had appeared before. They did not know that gauze had been cunningly stretched between them and the figures—which, it is notorious, has a surprising effect. Down sank the student slowly on his knees. The soft music rose and fell, the soft smile—was it of forgiveness or happiness?—played on that face, the arms wound in graceful attitudes—whispers went round, “Who? who is it?”

“Mrs. Lepell; don’t you know?”

“Fine creature—the accident;” and then from

Lord John, "Egad—she does it uncommon well. She knows how to work those arms of hers. Egad, ma'am, the stiff creatures of this town may take a lesson."

The student had risen and sunk on one knee before this apparition. "Who are you," he said, "that comes to disturb this miserable solitude? Leave me—leave me to my own troubles. Neither light nor comfort suit with this dreary heart. Leave me—I implore, leave me to darkness and misery; or if you be an angel that brings blessings, send me at least a quick deliverance, and hurry on the end that I sigh for."

Applause—the music rises and falls dismally, being, in fact, the famous *tremolo ritournelle* to which the two unhappy Corsican gentlemen used to visit each other.

The vision shook its head. "No," she said, sadly, "what you say is folly. Ah, why waste precious hours in misery? I have come to tell you it is the worst and most unacceptable homage you could pay to her whom you have lost. You are longing to meet her again. Ah, you know

not what a waste of this morbid affection there is in the world. It would fill the ocean, while she, perhaps at this moment—the lost Lenore—may be tripping through the ball-room of the Elysian fields, sitting in a corner half-way up the stairs, with a handsomer spectre, carrying on a shadowy flirtation. Do you know, foolish man, that living or dead women are all the same? They must live, and breathe, and flirt, or die; and all the lost Lenores in the world, whom foolish men are frantically bewailing, are at this consoling themselves in London or in Paris, in the parks or at the ball, or, perhaps, even in a *railway carriage hurrying here* from a foreign country—admiration is always welcome—always."

And the vision stopped short with a smile, half encouraging, half satirical. There was loud applause, though we are bound to say it was not understood by the rustics.

Lord John was seen clapping his hands with enthusiasm: "Bravo! capital! well put, Mrs. L. That's one two, for him—I didn't think she

could be so smart. Don't you see she is touching up our young friend's vanity *off the stage*? She means that for a girl he's after! Egad, and I think he feels it too."

The lover was indeed looking at his visitor, a little perplexed. He went on :

Severne.—"I thought you were a messenger from heaven, with comfort and divine consolation; but your comfort is of the world—worldly. It is tinged with a cold, unkind philosophy, which I do not care for. I have faith, and that is all I want."

The vision with a burst of laughter.—"So had Don Quixote in his windmills. How much you are to be envied, seeing angels everywhere, as you walk along, creatures bathed in golden light, models of perfection, while the prosy men and women about you only see—men and women. Oh!" added the vision, in a feigned rapture, "how charming is a child-like unsophistication; how delightful a perpetual infancy, that is all its life *just eight years old*, and sitting in the front row, with its little fingery-pingery in its mouth, looking on at a pantomime!"

Even the rustics understood this, and laughed ;
Lord John was in an ecstasy.

“ My Lord have mercy ! you saw that ! she’s given it to him, back and front, up and down, knocking the wind out of him ; my dear ma’am, our young friend wanted a lesson.”

This was to the clergyman’s wife, who was to send Captain Philips the cream.

“ It is very clever,” she said. “ He has treated her badly in her life-time, and ”—she stopped, a little doubtful.

“ Who, ma’am ? ” said Lord John.

“ The lost Lenore.”

“ The lost Foundling, ma’am,” said Lord John, contemptuously. “ Pish ! There, ma’am, look ; I declare he doesn’t know what to say. The feller’s dumbfounded. Suck your fingery-pingery. Ha ! ha ! ” Severne had risen.

“ If I was to choose,” he said, “ I would sooner be a child all my life, taking the pantomime for real angels and real gold and silver, than be one of the cold sect of philosophers to which *you, cold spectre*, belong. It is easy to laugh at every-

thing, and I congratulate *you*, a happy spirit, on these fortunate gifts. You will flit over the earth, from city to city, from street to street, from house to house. A happy life is before you; you can visit a hundred moody, foolish sufferers like me, boys of thirty, and sitting at their first pantomime, and believing everything. Your mission may be to console them, by teaching them to feel the scenes, and show them that the gilding on the gingerbread is only tinsel. You will succeed of course with *some*. But I do not envy you your mission, *lovely* and incomparable spirit."

Mrs. Lepell (assuming a wonderful expression of wounded sorrow, and drooping her head).—"Ah! this is the way, always the way. Poor me, with the best intentions in the world! I came from Paradise to console"—

Severne (scornfully).—"From *Paradise*?"

Mrs. Lepell (bending low).—"Poor me! again. Thanks for the charming compliment. Well, I must go back to one or other of *those two places*. Better, certainly, she did not come, if she has

been filling up her hours of sorrow with the miserable distractions of society and flirtation"—(the spectre now assuming a very scoffing tone)—"I leave you the dear little boy, in his jacket and frill, looking on at his pantomime. Sweet innocence—how charming, how delightful a picture—what a pastoral life—going to college—elected a member of parliament, and going into society, and all the time *a little boy*. Adieu, adieu ! Will it not have its sugarstick, or will it tell its papa of the naughty unfeeling spectre that came to trouble him and make it cry, perhaps ? Dry its eyes. It is, it is all real gold and silver. It is, indeed. Adieu !" —and with a scornful laugh the strange vision disappeared.

"By the Lord," said Lord John, almost aloud; "she is one ! how she gave it to him—turned him inside out. Did you ever hear such a scolding ?" But to say the truth, the company were puzzled to know what it all meant. "It was uncommon clever, you know, but what was all that about the boy at a pantomime — a very smart creature ? — and

she made him out rather a poor figure, you know."

Sir John was greatly pleased, and understood it fairly. "Well, you see, ma'am, she's a very clever creature, and Harry and she are always at it. A little sparring, and I declare I think she sent *him* to the wall, ma'am. As clever and deeply read a woman as you'd pick out. She's now at work, ma'am, on a fine book, good, old, solid reading, Bishop Digby—my ancestor's *Short Way with the Dissenters*—I'm dying to hear her on it. I expect she'll talk like a bishop."

Mrs. Severne, the charming mother, looked disturbed and annoyed. She did not seem to enjoy it, like Sir John, and indeed it must be said that there was an indistinct impression abroad that, in Sir John's phrase, "our friend there had cut rather a shy figure, you know."

And while they were getting ready for the third piece, it was thus freely criticised.

Lady Hall, though, had seen some life in town, and took a kind of surprised and amused tone,

which, it may be added, is a dangerous weapon if skilfully used.

“Really,” she said, “it is quite surprising, a person to be so much at home before such a crowd. *I* should faint. It is so *unusual* you know to meet it. You can’t get people generally to come forward in *that* way.”

“Oh, she’s very clever,” said Sir John, in profound admiration; “knows the world so well.”

“*So I should say*,” the lady answered, with a smile; “it’s a great treat. I never saw such a thing before, and *so severe*, and ready with her sharp things. I must *take care not to quarrel with her*.”

CHAPTER XII.

FRESH ARRIVALS.

THE Barrister was now very busy behind “the scenes” (as it was complimentarily called, though there were no scenes properly), getting ready “for *their* turn.” To say the truth, he and Mr. Canby, and the Miss Fentons, pronounced that that last scene “rather hung fire, you see.” It was rather too metaphysical; and that sort of thing didn’t do for charades—all that “hair-splitting” and special pleading; you must have “business.”

“Never mind,” said the Barrister; “can’t be helped—we must put our shoulders to the wheel, and stir ’em up this time. Look here, Canby; I’ve a capital notion, only just come into my head. I’m to come rushing in, carrying a jug of milk, and not see you, and come bolt against you,

and then we must both tumble over together, and smash the jug—and you'll see how they'll roar. We had it at Lady Oysterman's, and thought they'd never stop laughin'."

The reader will, no doubt, have guessed the two syllables of this clever charade. "Inn" was, of course, the first, and a very little consideration will help them to the second. "It was uncommonly good," every one said—Inn, the hotel, you know, and spectre, a ghost coming back from the other world. But how would they manage the "whole—Inspector?"

"Oh, my dear," said one country old lady; "leave it to *them*; they'll manage it, I warrant you, never fear; they're clever enough."

And this was the way they managed it—at a railway-station; *there* was an idea. It was the cleverest, *completetest* thing "you ever saw in the whole course of your life." You'd just fancy you were walking into the waiting-room at Datchley, and the whole thing positively "knocked up," as Mr. Canby assured us, with his own lips, "in less than half an hour." But the secret is, you know,

“you must have an eye for this sort of thing.” You hit it off at once, or miss at once; whereas common bunglers, with all the painters and carpenters in the universe, and a whole month, would break down. Strictly speaking, there was nothing special; but it was the air of a station—everything was perfect, even to the newsman, who was done by the Barrister, who, indeed, did fifty characters, with a surprising versatility, and who called “*Times*, *Post*, *Telegraph*, and mornin’ pipers”—observe “pipers”—enough, as a country gentleman remarked, “to make you split.” What shall be said when he came in as an elderly passenger, with a white hat, carrying a heap of luggage, which he dropped again and again, and had a dispute with a porter? “Now, that was as like what you’d hear on the platform as you could guess.” But what was this to his sudden change? When he came on again, having merely turned up the collar of his coat and painted on a number, he was there utterly changed—an inspector, with the hall-bell in his hand, and calling, “Take your seats, please; now

then, tickets, please ; passengers for London, Liverpool, and the Bilberry Junction. Take your seats." The capital he made out of this feat was, indeed, surprising ; the vivacity—the constant current of conversation, or rather monologue, he kept up was extraordinary. Indeed, Mr. Canby, who had laboriously got himself up in a porter's dress, had at times to remonstrate under his breath—" Oh, I say, confound it, do give a fellow a chance you know." But this chance Mr. Canby never got. He had not that readiness which is born of constant practice ; although he had, with great toil in his own chamber, elaborated some jests about " buffers " and " bilers," which did not get the fair play they ought to have had, and were overborne by the obstreperous raillery of the Barrister—, who, as the applause rose, grew more and more grasping,—almost forgot his partners—gave no time for a word in reply, and carried the whole thing through on his own shoulders. He was everything and everywhere, and in the grand *mélée* which wound it up, when the pas-

sengers, all growing riotous, crowded round the "Inspector" in a perfect Babel of tongues, nothing could be happier than the speech he made them—all impromptu, of course—and nothing could be neater than the allusion to the Hall at the end :

"My head's quite goin'," said the Barrister ; "there's about fifty parcels and 'ampers inside, d'rected to Sir John Digby. O ! Digby. Ah, there's a man for you, a true gent ! Ladies and gents, I've dined there *once or twice*" (great laughter ; a country gentleman explains to his wife—"Capital. You know he dines there every day,")—"and you never saw such 'ospitality. A splendid fust-class engine that, sir—good, solid, sound work—no tricks in him. Goes as steady as a rock ; and, ladies and gents, I hope that 'ere engine 'll continue to run on the Digby line for many and many a long year to come."

Could anything be neater or happier ? It was capital. It was hard to say whether the applause was for Sir John or for that clever Barrister, of whom the country gentleman again prophesied—

“Mark my words, that young fellow will be on the bench yet.”

The company now broke up. The soft tones of the harmonium were heard from behind the curtains; Miss Fenton had run to it under a happy inspiration, swelling out our noble National Anthem, which “makes every true Briton’s heart beat, sir;” and, it might be added, is recognised by those who have not a note of music in their constitution. On the harmonium, however, it became a little hard to distinguish from the Old Hundredth.

They poured out of “The Theatre”—so we may call it still, slight compliment enough after such labours. There was to be a supper in the small dining-room; and here was Captain Philips very fresh and in good humour, after a short nap and a tranquillising smoke—“for once in his life he had got a fair cigar at the moment he wanted it”—and he was now well inclined for “his” supper.

The guests were really delighted. “I assure you, I have seen worse at a London Theatre.”

“I can tell you, that young man would make his fortune on the boards.” Happy young man, who had thus no less than two careers before him, and the very highest places in those careers.

There was to be a sort of dance after the supper. The young barrister came down modestly among the crowd, and was followed wonderingly by many rustic eyes. “There he is,” he heard many times as he passed. “Look, my dear.” He was just like you or me, or any one else. It is only weak natures that are overset by triumphs of this sort.

“O you are very good to say so, just a little thing knocked up in half an hour. If one had had time you know. But, I must say, we pulled through very fairly.”

There, too, were the Miss Fentons, who had kept on their dress of office, the charming bar-maid, for whom rustic youths sighed, and to whom they were introduced with hot cheeks and much confusion. Captain Philips sauntered about with an air of amused tolerance.

“I am sure it was all very grand. I can take

your word for it. It was, of course, the finest thing ever done on any stage. Our friend there, of course distinguished himself. The Lord Chancellor will hear of it, and make him Attorney-General. Between you and me, this is the worst ordered house I ever was in—not Sir John's fault, of course. But, I bet you half a sovereign, those beasts of servants have supper cooling on the table, and don't think it worth their while to come and tell us, I suppose jabbering over this tomfoolery."

The Captain was quite right, for in all matters connected with the table, he had an instinct that was almost certainty.

But for the charming vision who had been so witty, so piquant, and—though the gauze had such an air of divine spirituality—the graceful creature, who had played, with such a just title to the part, the comforter from the skies—hers was the real triumph of the night. She shrank from wearing that graceful white robe, with the gold edging, as entailing *almost too great a publicity*.

"*Don't ask me, please,*" she said, almost pite-

ously. “I *don’t* like ; and after all he said and did. Oh, I must have lost my head.” Well, surely we could compound the matter—concede something ; and it was agreed that the head-dress—the gold fillet and the hair down on the shoulders, should be retained, as a concession to public feeling. How the rustic eyes followed her as she walked through the crowd on *Sir John’s arm*.

“ You did it really very well, ma’am—so uncommon ready ; and you touched *him* up nicely. It made me laugh. I assure you a month of that sort of thing will do him—good training, you know—teach him to put down those infernal flippant Radicals.”

“ Ah, Sir John, what praise ! You overpower me ! It’s too kind of you ! But *he* ! Oh, Sir John, I am so sorry I did it, for *he* will never forgive me—never.”

“ Tut, tut,” said Sir John, in high good humour ; “ to be sure he will. And he *shall*, too. Let us go and find him now. Tell me now, where did you pick it up ? For, to tell you the truth, I didn’t believe, you know——”

“Exactly, Sir John. I didn’t think myself. I suppose,” said she, a little slyly, and putting back the long hair; “I was reading, Sir John, a chapter of your bishop, just before dinner; and I believe I must have caught up some of his *smart capital* style——”

Sir John stopped to laugh loudly. “Oh, good, good, good,” he said. “What! reading ‘The Short Way?’ I knew you’d like it. Very good indeed. I am glad of this. And so you picked up those smart things from the bishop, eh? Sly of you though.”

“Oh, it was delightful, Sir John. So funny, too.”

Sir John became grave and almost discomposed.

“I mean so lively and severe. Do you remember, Sir John, where he says how dreadful Dissenters, are? Now let me remember the exact words. Yes—‘The very Black Beetles of Sedition that creep, yea and crawl over this fair land of England.’ Is not that good, Sir John?”

“Oh, fine, fine,” answered Sir John, “and

how you *pick it up*—how *very good*! the Black Beetles—so they are."

"Oh, and again, Sir John—let me think," she went on, putting her hand to her forehead to recollect. "Ah, yes, where he says that those who would introduce forms, you know, Sir John, and ceremonies into our holy churches, they do remind me of those young sparks in our civil train bands, who ape the air and bearing of His Majesty's troops."

Sir John looked at her with wonder. "She has it by heart," he cried. "Upon my word you delight and surprise me, ma'am. I tell you what I'll do; I'll write to London to-morrow morning, and you must let me get you down a little present. I must gratify myself in this—not a word. I'll just write to Johnson, a smart fellow in Piccadilly, and make him hunt high and low, and scour London for a copy of the bishop; and you must leave me your address, and he'll send it; but it's very scarce."

We may conceive how gratifying was this to our heroine. The bishop *was* scarce, and "un-

told gold," according to Sir John. She thought for the moment, though, from the manner and form of words used, that it was to have been an ornament, or some such vulgar decoration. Disappointed; no——

And here was Severne. "Come here, sir," said Sir John, in high good humour. "Come, sir, show yourself to this lady. She's done you a world of good already."

Mrs. Lepell shrank away. "O, he will not speak to me, and no wonder. I lost my head. I did indeed. I forgot what I was about, and said such things."

There was an air of vexation about Severne mixed with an attempt at good humour. "Good gracious!" said he, "how—why? Surely it was all fun. You had the best of it, certainly; but then, to tell you the truth, I was taken by surprise."

"*Indeed I saw that,*" she said, sadly, "as well you might be. Oh, some wicked spirit came and took possession of me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sir John, "then I can

tell you what that was. Only think, my boy, that was all the bishop."

"The bishop!" said Severne, in wonder.

"The bishop's doing. 'The Short Way,' my friend; she's full of it. Has it by heart. Can say it backwards. Can't be kept from it—say that, ma'am, about the black beetles for him."

"O that's it," said Severne, with a strange look in his eyes, and in perfect good humour now. "Dear me, so *that* explains it. Devouring the bishop! 'The Short Way'—ha, ha!"

Mrs. Lepell put aside her hair, and looked at him with that calm steady gaze of misunderstanding, which she sometimes used on such occasions. "No," she said, shaking her head, "I can't follow. He laughs at me for reading serious books. Sir John, *I am sure at this moment he thinks I am pretending.* And yet I would put this book into his hand this moment, and let him examine me as they do at Oxford. Is there any crime in us poor women reading these serious books? As the poor bishop said, 'we poor women are in the militia, Sir John,

and I suppose Mr. Severne thinks we are aping the line."

Sir John nearly fell down with laughter at this clever turn. "O, now you may give up, Harry," he said: "you can't do it, you know. She's too much for you—there, Mrs. Lepell, go with him and get your supper comfortably. There's roast wild duck down here. I must look after my Lady Hall."

There was a pause. Severne gave her his arm.

"Sir John is right," he said; "you are too much for me. The fact I confess at once. I am all out. I am a mere babe in judging."

Mrs. Lepell looked round nervously. "Now," said she, "I can speak. And oh! I was longing to speak to you quietly, and without any one being by."

"O, goodness, why should you think of that?" he said. "Much more to the point. Here we are at the ducks. Will you have a wing?"

"Anything—any part," said she, in the same hopeless tone, and holding out her plate. "You

don't understand me," she said, "as you say, most truly; and it is most natural you should not. I don't expect any one to take the trouble. Why should I? But I merely wanted to explain. You thought I was forward, unfeminine, smart, flippant, and all *the* rest of it. You did, I know. I saw it in your face."

"That most expressive face."

"Well, yes," she said, calmly, "if you like; but I merely want to explain, and we shall not say anything more after this; *and you can believe me or not, as you please.*"

"O dear me," he said. "Why, this is the play going on still."

"Yes, believe me or not, as you please. You don't believe me about that book of Sir John's. You know you don't. I can't help *that*. But I wish to say this—I assure you, when I stepped upon that stage to-night, I no more meant to speak in that way—and I say this from my heart—than I—than I—"

Severne waited a moment. "That form is always hard to finish," he said, smiling, "unless,

indeed, you can bring in that something unborn, who has done such duty before now——”

Other guests at the supper were looking at her almost Pagan figure, the fillet and the long hair, and the tragedy-earnestness in her eyes. He saw she was a little put out at his coldness and *wit*, and was pleased.

“Just let me finish then,” she answered, “and you can make fun of me then as much as you like. When I stood there, everything came rushing on me—*your manifest dislike* to me from the first——”

“Goodness, Mrs. Lepell ! ”

“Yes ; let me finish—your repugnance to let me into the house—a mere wanderer—an adventuress, perhaps—though recollect, *Sir John knows all our family*. Your making me an object for that keen wit which Mr. Severne means later to treat the House of Commons to, and those little whispers about poor me, and my reading ‘The Short Way,’ which is one of kind Sir John’s most natural hobbies—I say I thought of all this, at that single moment, and I could not resist trying,

you know, Mr. Severne, in my weak way, to make some little defence. I was very absurd, and very foolish, and very pert and arrogant—whatever you like—and I can only beg pardon very humbly."

And a portly gentleman, in a white waistcoat, with a plate in his hand which he was trying to get rid of over somebody's shoulder, saw the brilliant lady whom he had so admired on the stage, with a suppliant expression, and her hands put together in an attitude of prayer.

"Good gracious!" said Severne. "Nonsense—now don't. Why you make too much of everything. *I* wanted to turn you out of the house! Nothing of the kind. As you ask me, I do say I don't quite believe in your frantic enthusiasm for 'The Short Way.' But now, admit I am not to be in the best and most favourable of humours, after the public attack you made upon me—which, however, I don't complain of, as I brought it on myself."

"Very well," said Mrs. Lepell, hastily; "let us say no more; you have humiliated me in addition

by making me ask pardon. That fat gentleman going away saw me. No matter. It is another lesson. Let us be on the old terms until I go, at least."

"What do you call the old terms," he said much interested, "a kind of half and half toleration—neither war nor peace?"

"Give me a little of that duck, please," said she, very pleasantly; "away with sentiment. No, I prefer war. No half-and-half measures with me. It must be war or peace, Mr. Severne. So, make up your mind."

He paused.

"Do you know," said he, "and forgive me for saying it, that you are a very extraordinary person?"

"Another compliment," said she, smiling. "Could you get me a little wine, Mr. Severne?"

"I mean," he said, hastily, "an out-of-the way character—one that you don't meet every day."

"A crime?" said Mrs. Lepell.

“No,” he said, gravely. “As for war; no, of course not, or rather—let me think it over.”

“There’s Lord John,” said she, eagerly. “*He’s* my friend! Ah, Lord John, I saw you applauding—it was very good of you!”

“It was,” replied Lord John. “Come with me now, and take a turn round the place, I want to talk to you. You have done enough to *him*! Here, take this arm.”

“Delighted, Lord John,” she said, and putting her plate into Severne’s hand, went off eagerly, leaving him a little astonished.

“I am quite pleased with you, you know,” said his lordship; “you’re an uncommon game-some creature, and the way you dressed up that lad delighted me.”

“Everybody is telling me this, Lord John,” she said, with a look of pain, “and I can’t make it out. Surely it was only a play.”

“Oh, Mrs. Innocence,” he said, laying his finger to his nose; “that does well enough for the soft ones. Oh, you’re a deep little sharp-shooter;

you were not brought up on gruel and weak tea."

"Now, Lord John," she said, gravely, "none of *these freedoms*. I had to scold you to-day, recollect."

"Oh, my dear!" said Lord John, putting on a low bass voice, highly comical—"of course—of course, to be sure, I kiss the rod that smites me, and a very nice rod it is—eh?"

Mrs. Lepell took no notice of this.

"Who are you, now?" said Lord John, in a gay, airy way (he had been obliged to "oil" his throat all that night. He felt, he said, as if he was in a flour-mill). "Confide in me—in 'Pappa Johnny,' as some young friends of mine in Paris used to call me. It was very pretty to hear them trying the English in an infantine way—'Pap-pa Jeanny;' all tricks, you know, but it was very nice. Come, tell me now about yourself. Where do you come from? Who are you? There has been some little fun in your life, my dear girl. Better out with it at once. By the Jingo, that'll come for me one of these days in a black coach

with sulphur and brimstone—*I'll make it out for myself.* Now I'm serious ; I give you fair warning, my little child."

Mrs. Lepell drew her arm away quickly, and looked at him courageously.

"I am sure you are not in earnest, Lord John. You could not speak in that way to anyone, if you were serious. Speak so, sir, if you like, to the creatures you taught to call you 'Pappa Johnny:' but not to an English lady, whose helpless husband lies sick up-stairs, unable to protect her."

Lord John dropped back in a sort of convulsion of delight, and caught at the wall. "If she goes on, she'll kill me ! This goes beyond all the beyonds ! Why, you beat Pappa Johnny to sticks. You'd sew us all in a sack, before I could say 'Jack Robinson.' Well, I won't worry you ; but, hang it, why can't you gratify a curious and engaging young creature like me ? You see, my dear, I wouldn't for the world pry into female history—the Lord forbid and guard us !" added his lordship, in a chanting tone ; "but, you see, the way is, I know every man, woman, and child on God's

earth for the last twenty years—every soldier, horse and foot—every Jack traveller, man and child—men of all kinds, shapes, sizes, and classes; and women—well, hem!—no matter about that (see how nice I'm behaving—I'll be saved yet, my dear). Well now, knowing all this, and with such opportunity—why, the What's-his-name himself, my master—ahem!—must be in it, if the story doesn't get to me in some way of itself, without my moving a limb or stirring a hand. *Don't you see that, my dear? Think it over.* As it is, I have put two and two together already."

He paused. A little trouble and uncertainty came into her face, and her eyes fell upon the ground. Lord John smiled and winked to himself. They were walking along one of the long galleries that ran round the house, and were coming into the hall.

"Why, what in the name of gluttony," said Lord John, "is all this about? Trunks coming in, and women's trunks, too. Ask Pappa Johnny to tell you the difference. Who is running from the bailiffs now? More company coming to gorge.

God help the host. My dear, I congratulate you, heart and soul, body and bones. You'll be topsawyer in this house, if you play your cards well. Why, old Sir John there, you'll twist him about your thumb like a bit of black ribbon ; and as for that donkey, Severne, you rolled his nose in the mud. Well, well, my dear ; but I forgot our poor, poor helpless husband lying up stairs, sir. '*You dare not do it, sir !*' Capital ! Ha, ha ! You'll be all right here, my dear ; and—here's more, I declare. Here they come, after their trunks ! Duncan, who in the name of Satan is coming in now ?'

Duncan answered, as if this was the correct form by which servants of quality should be addressed—"The ladies, sir, that have been expected—Mrs. Palmer, sir."

"Good again," said Lord John, "I must have a good stare at them as they come in. *Would* you, sir?"—this to a stout gentleman, and lady as stout, who were coming from "their" supper in great good-humour.

Through the open hall-door came a rather tall and slight lady, sweeping the oak hall with a

large Indian shawl. Behind her walked timidly a young girl, tall also, with black hair and rather brilliant cheeks. The wondering company, idle, and listeners—stopped to stare, and almost made a sort of lane.

Duncan came to Lord John :

“Would you, my lord,” he said—“I can’t find Mr. Severne or Sir John—would you speak to the ladies, sir, while I run and look?”

“All right,” said Lord John, and again with a “*Will* you, my good sir?” to the stout gentleman in front, was making towards the two ladies, who were standing irresolute. Suddenly Lord John drew back and turned away sharply, “By the Immortal!” he said. “What the devil——!”

He drew away Mrs. Lepell, and walked down the gallery, smiling and muttering to himself, “God Almighty! after *that*—among decent women, too!”

Mrs. Lepell wondered. “You know them, Lord John?” she asked.

He did not hear her, and was smiling to himself, “Well! well!” Then he suddenly stopped and

released his arm. "My dear woman," he said, "you know the road—on as straight as a whip. Follow that nice little nose of yours. I've something to do—letters to write, of course."

He left her there; but he was wrong. She did *not* know the road; and now, here was Severne hurrying down from the other end.

"I have lost my way," she said, smiling, "and Lord John has very unhandsomely——"

"Did you hear they had come?" he asked, hastily. "Which way? Where are they—in the hall? Quick! Ah, I see," and he was gone in a moment.

And a charming little speech about "our reconciliation" perished on her lips. She was annoyed by these two ungallant desertions; and, indeed, she saw that Severne was now possessed with but one thought—the brilliant creature (for Mrs. Lepell had to own this to herself) who had arrived that night.

But already it was breaking up. The carriages were galloping on the gravel. There was a crowd of fluttering figures in the hall. There were the

heartiest and most *grateful* good-byes. The young barrister is shawling, or rather, to use his own droll phrase, "opera-cloaking" a young lady ; and we can see one of the stout gentlemen of the country speak to him.

" My name is Barrow, sir. You delighted me, sir. Excuse me, but if you are down here again, hope you will look in at Barrowcliff. We shall see you on the woolsack yet, sir."

" You do me proud, sir," the young man answered, in a pleasant and humorous way ; " and when I am sitting in the House, if you have any little *case*, we'll manage it, and coach it through ;" and the young advocate laid his finger to his nose with infinite humour.

" Ha, ha ! very good, sir."

And going home in the carriage, he entertained "his ladies" with an account of the interview. It was a very pleasant night indeed. It was known that there were two "new ladies" arrived, but they had gone straight to their rooms.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW GUESTS.

AT breakfast, the next morning, every one was looking anxiously for the new arrivals. They were a little late, and came in with Severne, who introduced them in a perfect flutter.

Mrs. Palmer had a firm, steady face, with glossy black hair, laid very flat to her forehead, which gave her an almost "hard" look. Her eyes were quick, and periodically travelled from face to face. The flat, black hair she often smoothed, during which operation she did not droop her eyes, as some may do; but peeped through her fingers as if they were chinks—at least, Lord John was heard to vow to his God that he had caught her very often.

But more troubled and restless eyes were bent on the daughter. The Miss Fentons looked at

her askance, and with suspicion. This gorgeousness of colour, brilliancy of eyes—so wonderful—were dangerous. When she spoke, her voice was like a stream of music; but she kept so tranquil and composed and unexcited, that a gleam of hope came to them, and they began secretly and joyfully to entertain the idea that she was a girl who could only fall into attitudes, and “look pretty.” We must recollect that these poor Fentons, like the little Arabs and “codgers” of the street, had their wits prematurely sharpened, and were trained never to lose a chance.

Mrs. Palmer, the mamma, was a “comfortable woman,” and eat with great heartiness—speaking as she went on :

“This is most kind of you, Sir John Digby,” she said, “and we are so glad to see Mr. Severne strong again. We had some very pleasant weeks when he was with us. We can only stay a couple of days, Sir John, and must pack up our camp-kettles on the day after to-morrow—mind, dear, you have notice.”

Mrs. Lepell caught Captain Philips' eye, and smiled at him—perhaps an incredulous smile. Mrs. Palmer saw it, and went on quite calmly.

“We knew a very witty Frenchman,” she said, “Baron Molé, who had been an envoy in Italy, who said that vampires were all fables and nonsense; but that the *real* vampire was the guest that was going every day, but remained every day. What was that story he told us, dear, of the French Countess that got thrown from her horse at his palace-door, and was convalescent every night in time for dinner, but had a relapse every morning, and stayed six weeks altogether?”

This anecdote—accidental, no doubt—came in very awkwardly; but did not make Mrs. Palmer feel awkward.

“Would you be kind enough?” she said to Mrs. Lepell across the table, “just that clotted cream near you. Captain Philips has been praising it so——”

This was given like an order; and Mrs. Lepell, in some haste dropped the knife, &c., off the plate.

Now entered Lord John. "You have left a trifle, I hope, for a hungry man. Ain't I early, eh? I'll save my soul, my boy—cold pheasant, yes—save my soul and be sitting in Paradise yet, with a crown on my head, when all the bishops are howling. Mrs. L., there's room next you, I see—down *here*, I mean—ha, ha!"

"I say," said Sir John, "you see we have new friends—Mrs. Palmer, Lord John Raby—Miss Palmer, Lord John."

Both ladies bowed with ceremony. Lord John nodded to Mrs. Palmer, but stared at Miss Palmer.

"I saw *you* come in last night," he said to her. "Funny time to arrive, wasn't it? with the fiddles scraping like all the cats in——ahem!—broke loose. What did you take us for?"

The young lady looked at him gravely, and with a repulsion so unconcealed, that, as was evident to all round, it made his lordship blush a little.

"Are we Tonga Islanders?" said he, rather wickedly, "or have I seven heads? Will you

count 'em, please? How you do look at me! What's the matter, now?"

The colour came to the young lady's face very fiercely.

"I did not understand your allusion," she said. "It is, as you say, the language of the Tonga Islanders to me."

"My dear!" said her mother, with warning; then in a whisper to Lord John—"She is so impulsive—flames up at the least word."

Severne had just come in and stood at the door, listening. There was great delight, and almost pride, in his face—as, indeed, Mrs. Lepell and Lord John saw.

Lord John said nothing, but turned to his neighbour—"Look at *him*," he said. "Just look at his soft sucking looks of love. There'll be fine work by-and-by, mark me. He's taken it hot and strong, he has."

That day, however, was a day of departures. Captain Philips was "obliged to go." If he remained, as he told Lord John, in what was little better than an open shed, he might as well take

to his bed ; as it was, among them all, with their passages and infernal baronial nonsense, they had left him the beginnings of a lumbago for next spring.

“Take my advice,” he said to Sir John, “and *do* get the thing modernised—these passages cut up, and double doors everywhere. Of course it’s no affair of mine, but they’ll be bringing in man-slaughter against you, if you don’t mind, one of these fine mornings. I’ve had a knife down my back ever since I came.”

Sir John never knew how to answer this cool officer, though he did not like his tone.

“Not offended, I hope,” said Philips. “You know it ain’t my affair *now*. If every guest you had were bellowing with rheumatics, of course that would be their own business. Good-bye ! Now driver, don’t dawdle, but touch up your cattle well.”

The Dean went also ; so did the young officer who had caused such uneasiness in the shooting to Captain Philips. Selby remained for “one more day” though he had fixed on going.

“You may as well,” was Sir John’s sincere, though careless invitation. “There’s no one for your room, and we shall be glad to have you, sir —so please yourself.”

But the fact was, Mrs. Lepell had met him in the corridor which had been so fatally “draughty” to Captain Philips.

“Are you *sorry*, Mr. Selby,” she said, with grief, “at *leaving* us?”

“Yes,” he had said, nervously, “I have been here too long. I am not wanted. I must go. No one will miss me?”

This was put as a question.

“Oh, yes,” answered she, gravely, “I shall. I tell you so, Mr. Selby. And I would like you to stay—I really would. You are one of my friends—a very small circle, recollect—so I like to keep them about me.”

Her look was so open, and there was such candour in this avowal, that Selby was hardly pleased. He would have preferred less speech and more confusion.

“I should like to remain,” he said, irresolutely.

"Good-bye, then, if you must go," said Mrs. Lepell, whose eyes had been wandering down restlessly to the end of the gallery. "I hope we shall see you again some of these days—good-bye."

"I should *like* to stay," said Selby, wistfully.

"Stay then," she said, with a little air of mystery and confidence which was always very becoming to her. "Take my advice. There"—and she was gone. Whoever was waiting, was, no doubt, impatient.

Mr. Selby, of course, remained.

"Well, Sir John," he said, "I should *like* to stay, you know."

"All right," said Sir John, coolly. "Then tell Duncan not to have the carriage round."

At lunch that day they all met again. The ladies were present. Miss Palmer seemed every moment to be growing in confidence. She talked, in her low, musical voice, on subjects above the common level, with an enthusiasm that was not pedantic, and made every one listen. Even her phrases and choice of words were more or less exaggerated: and yet it was an exaggeration that

seemed only refreshingly quaint. A little sneer, or contradiction only "warmed her up," as Lord John said; and she "put down" that nobleman more than once in a very effective way.

Mrs. Lepell was silent, and looked at her with surprise—not unnaturally, lifting her eyebrows at this forwardness in one so young. She was sitting next Sir John.

"What do you think of her—confidentially, you know?" said he.

Mrs. Lepell looked at him slyly. "May I tell you?" she asked, a little timorously.

"Certainly, ma'am," he said.

"Well, then, Sir John, she reminds me of what a certain writer once said—a little wickedly—of a terrible man that flourished long ago. 'His tongue seemeth to caper hard against his mind, but leaveth the latter-named in the ditch.'"

Sir John laughed. "Not bad," he said; "but where did you pick that up, ma'am?"

"Where would you think, Sir John?" and the eyes fell demurely.

Suddenly Sir John burst out with a laugh of delight. "What! not in the bishop, eh? You don't say so. Famous—capital! Oh, I must tell *that*! The tongue capering up to the mind, and leaving the whole lot in the ditch. Now that you do say it," added Sir John, listening to Miss Palmer, "it hits our young friend off exactly. Oh, after lunch, you must come into the study and show me the very place; and we'll get down the bishop and have a good, long hour's study at him."

Mrs. Lepell shook her head. "As for finding *that*," she said, "it is a very big folio, recollect, Sir John. Just turning over the leaves my eye fell on the passage."

Afterwards, Sir John put on his spectacles, and took the book on his knees, as if it was a child; and searched every page, but never could find the remark. It was a pity, for many visitors were deprived of the correct shape of "one of the *best* things you ever heard in the whole course of your life. The soul and body cutting capers together and tumbling into a ditch!"

As he was laughing over this, and Lord John was growling to his neighbour that it was only one of the old two-penny-halfpenny jokes, a servant came in with a letter, and said that a man on horseback was waiting to take back an answer. Sir John turned it over again and again, and laid it down on the table while he got out his glasses.

“Why,” said he, “it’s from old George Lee! Did he say Mr. Lee had come back?”

“Yes, sir; came back last night.”

“Phew! what’s in the wind now?” said Sir John, reading. “I declare——” he stopped and read. “Here, Duncan, get out the phaeton and pair, and tell the man I’ll be over as soon as he is. What can be up? George Lee down from London, when I thought he was speaking to the House of Commons for his country—wants to see me on particular business. Says he’s not quite himself. D’ye hear, Harry?—I’m going over to Leefield—what d’ye say to that, sir?”

Severne, whispering in a low voice to Miss Palmer, started. “Mr. Lee down here,” he said. “What can he want?”

“Never, mind, sir,” said Sir John, rising. “We’ll see to-night. Don’t wait dinner for me, if I don’t turn up at seven. I have my suspicions—but no matter. All in good time, my boy. I declare, fancy Lee sending for me !”

Sir John was gone, in good spirits. Severne looked after him with a little disquiet.

“Who is this Mr. Lee,” asked Mrs. Lepell, softly.

“Member for the county,” said Lord John. “Hot and strong. Tory—rank to a degree—knock you down—butcher every Whig in the country. No wonder the baronet runs to him.”

“I must go now,” said Mrs. Lepell. “Nurse is wanted ;” and then went up to her sick husband.

He was much better that morning, and there were hopes of “getting him” down for a walk in the sun, or, perhaps, an easy drive along the smooth avenue. Nurse went up to her duty.

Selby looked after her with deep and sad admiration, and said, “*There was a faithful wife !*” He never saw such *unobtrusive*, unostentatious devotion !

“ Such unobtrusive, unostentatious devotion ! ”
repeated Lord John, looking at him from foot to
head. “ *That’s* a good one ! I suppose that can
be said of you, too. It’s like the knights, ain’t it ?
Soul of honour, and all that. Not daring to lift
our eyes, you know, but still worshipping secretly
and virtuously, eh ? No harm in that ; eh, my
friend ? ”

The broad-shouldered young man coloured. “ I
never understand your jokes, Lord John,” he said ;
“ and don’t care to be made the subject of them.”

Lord John turned on him at once. “ Oh, don’t
you ? ” he said. “ But, my dear Knight Templar,
I never consult people on the matter. I give you
fair notice. If you wish to do battle for your
divine ladye, then with all my heart. There’s the
bowling-green behind ! Come ! No ? My poor
boy,” added his lordship, soothing, “ don’t let it
be angry or too thin-skinned. I say, look at him,”
said Lord John, laughing loudly and pointing to
him. “ I declare, if he ain’t in earnest. Look at
his cheeks, I say ! Oh, by the Lord ! —this is
worth coming to Digby for ! ”

This was a malicious turn of his lordship's, who was accustomed to fall thus savagely on any one who crossed his humours. Selby was a little awkward, and stood there glowing, and literally not knowing how to answer.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LONG DAY.

THE snow had begun to fall. About two hours later Mrs. Lepell came down looking for the party, or for some of them, but could not find them. The servant told her they were not out. She tried the various large galleries, but without success ; and, wondering very much, was about going to the garden, when, as she passed the door of one of the small rooms, she thought she heard the sound of voices, or of a voice. It seemed to her—oddly enough—as if some one was reading prayers aloud for the household, like Sir John in the morning. She opened the door and saw a curious scene. A young girl, eager, excited, with flushing cheeks and flashing eyes, was standing up in the centre of the room, with a shawl draped about her very picturesquely. The whole com-

pany was sitting round, and as Mrs. Lepell entered somebody motioned to her with a hand, to get to a chair and make no noise. Lord John looked over at her, and patted the seat of one next him, into which she accordingly stole—but with some reluctance.

It was Miss Palmer reciting “Lady Clara Vere de Vere”—it had come about in the most natural way. Her mother had insisted—and she, knowing that delightful social truth, that nothing is worth “making a fuss about,” had consented, very naturally and without affectation, just to amuse them until the snow was over. It was really a dramatic performance, full of soul, and earnestness, and feeling, with a deep and mournful pathos in her voice which touched them. Severne’s face was turned towards her with delight; Selby’s was looking down with suspicion; the mother’s was full of pride. As soon as she was done there was loud applause.

“Bravo!” cried Lord John, aloud. “Rachel couldn’t touch it.” Then, to Mrs. Lepell—“My dear lady, you have only come in time—this girl

is gradually taking the wind out of your—I mean, out of all our sails. She's working up to be first fiddle here.”

Mrs. Lepell bit her lips for a moment. Lord John watched her, then said, quietly,—

“ Well, after all, it's very much of the school-room, this sort of thing. You should stand up, my dear, and do *your* spouting-piece. You know what I mean; and, between ourselves, I liked the way you put our friend yonder in the sack last night fifty times better.”

Then Miss Palmer was begged to give a little more, which she did in the same good-natured way.

She struck into the “Lament of a Jewess”—a poem about one of that tribe who had been wooed and won, and deserted, by a Christian. It was written by “the Rev. Archer Longman,” Canon of Middlesex, and was called—

“ESTHER.

“ Thus far on my road—the place is nigh—
The wretched Jewess wanders back to die!
This is the spot, the grove, the little gate,
Where, of a summer eve, I used to wait,
Watching the dying sun—the netted trees
* * * * *

“ Where is the winding path—the shady wood ”—

It went on in this strain for many lines. The way she crawled and crouched, the fierce defiance in her eye, the vengeance, the play of passions were surprising. There was loud applause.

“Egad, we’ll be nowhere by-and-by,” whispered Lord John; “that is, our side of the house; but how long is this to go on? Well, I have had enough to do me for three weeks—she’s gathered a million of cobwebs in my throat, I can tell you,” and his lordship rose and stretched himself.

“What did I tell you?” said Severne, coming round enthusiastically. “Did I say a word too much?”

Indeed, the performance had produced a profound impression; and Mrs. Lepell was left there standing without anyone having noticed her entrance. This is always an awkward and trying situation. She might not feel awkward, or have not a notion of a rivalry, but we know people *think* there is such a feeling in our hearts, and hence our awkwardness. Indeed, for the rest of that day Miss Palmer seemed to go about at-

tended by a train, drawn after her by a sort of attraction.

Lord John snarled—"That young jack of a Severne seems to be her showman, like the wax-work fellow. I'll ask him why he don't get a wand and say, 'Observe the movement of the eyes. Please take notice of the graceful curve of the arms.' Ah, my dear girl" (Mrs. Lepell had long since found it useless to protest against this familiarity), "I'd like to describe *you* with a wand! What a showman I'd make! Ladies and gentlemen, observe that fine cheek—those round brilliant eyes, in—in which—"

"Now, Lord John, you are beginning—"

"In which, I say—don't interrupt—you can see the usual pupils, iris and all that sort of thing. Observe I mean no compliment. Observe, too, that round, cozy little—"

Mrs. Lepell coloured. "I must go away, Lord John. I see you don't mind a word I say."

"With all my heart," he said, following. "I'll continue the description before these people. I know you'd like that better,"

Mrs. Lepell turned back irresolutely.

“Oh, hang it,” added his lordship, stretching his arms, “what rubbish I talk! This is weary work, my dear.”

Dinner hour arrived. They waited a quarter of an hour; then a second quarter, for Sir John; then sat down. They had a merry banquet. Still Miss Palmer reigned. Mr. Selby had, by some providence, as it seemed to him, got next to Mrs. Lepell; but she was “in low spirits,” she said. He was much put out of humour by Lord John, who was more lively than his wont, and gravely called him through dinner “King Arthur.” “Ah, *you'd* like a ‘Round Table,’ my friend.”

The evening wore on, and at last, about ten, the sounds of wheels were heard. Sir John came in joyously and triumphantly, and with pink cheeks, and in great excitement.

“Don’t mind me,” he said; “I am all right. I have dined, and dined well; and put in as good a day’s work as ever was done. Leave sherry in the study, Duncan, and you, Severne, my dear boy, come with me. I have something to say to

you, my lad, that will make you jump in your very boots."

Severne went out without saying a word, and without reflecting this joyful mood of his relation. All present wondered.

Lord John whispered to Mrs. Lepell—"I bet you there's something coming for our friend. I never saw the old man in this way before. He's as down as anything, did you see?"

By-and-by the company, after waiting with a curiosity that was pardonable enough, began to drop away to bed. Mrs. Palmer and her daughter remained; so did Mrs. Lepell. The latter lady said she never could bear to go to rest until midnight. Near that hour, at last came up Severne, with a troubled face and excited in his manner.

"I thought I should find you here alone," he said to the Palmers. "No matter—in the morning it will do."

A little wounded, Mrs. Lepell rose up without a word, and went to get her candle. He saw her look, and was filled with compunction. He ran to her.

"I did not mean that," he said; "indeed, no; but this is something that concerns *them* and *me*. You understand."

She laughed good-humouredly.

"Quite right," she said. "I have no right to know your secrets. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Palmer."

"Ah, you are angry," said Severne. She went away without answering. Thus the day ended.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EXPLOSION.

NEXT morning were to be more departures. Lord John was to go that evening.

“I have ordered the trap,” he said, at breakfast, “for five. You’ll be all crying after me, won’t you? Here’s Mrs. Lepell been awake all night—to my certain knowledge.”

But there was a little gloom on Severne’s face. He was restless, and almost nervous. Sir John was very boisterous, and in good spirits. Mrs. Lepell, no doubt, wondered what was this mystery. After breakfast was over she went up to her husband—to duty. No wonder Sir John said that a more faithful and dutiful and steady little wife he had never met, and with such good sound tastes. That woman was “well grounded” when she was young. We can guess pretty well the

“sound” tastes to which he was alluding. When she came down again, she happened to look into the library, and in a moment Severne came hurrying through with his hat in his hand.

“Sir John not here?” he said, and was going away, but a soft voice called him back.

“Mr. Severne,” she said, “I am afraid——”

“Afraid of what?” said he bluntly.

“Nothing!” she answered; “but will you forgive me? I hope there has been no bad news.”

“Bad news!” he answered hastily. “What made you think of *that*? Wait though,” he said, closing the door. “Sir John says you are such a monument of sense, and perhaps—ah! Mrs. Lepell,” he said, throwing himself into one of the great chairs, “I am in a miserable difficulty. I don’t know what to do or where to turn to.”

She went over to him very kindly, and sat down on the sofa opposite.

“I am *not* a monument of sense,” she said, smiling, “as no one knows better than you. That is some of the old sarcasm. But if I can help by my little advice, indeed I shall try, and if

sympathy and good-will can do anything—and perhaps a little sense—we might strike out something between us."

"You are good, after all," he said, eagerly, "and I shall stop all my nonsense. In a few words, then, do you know what has turned up since last night? That old Lee, who is our Conservative member—a wretched, narrow-minded, bigoted, ignorant old man, who thinks that 'the Glorious Constitution' means a slavery and oppression worthy of the worst days of Spain—this model man has found out that there is something wrong with his heart, and that the agitation of parliamentary life, or rather the disappointment at seeing concessions made to his fellow-subjects, is too exciting. He is going abroad, and is going to retire. Do you see anything now? It is hardly fair to ask you as yet—so—"

"He wishes you to take his place," Mrs. Lepell went on very readily and calmly, "and assumes that you will take up his principles. You would like his place and scorn his principles.

Further, this old Tory has a daughter or niece, one out of a dozen, and Sir John wishes to fasten you into his principles by a good stout chain--of marriage?"

Severne looked at her wondering.

"You are extraordinary. Why, you have got the whole story. I was half an hour getting the Palmers to understand. My dear Mrs. Lepell, advise; say, what *you* would do? I have seen this coming for a long time. I knew it *must* come at last, and that I would have to face it. Sir John must have an answer to-day. Indeed, he wonders at the delay. But the truth is, as you have guessed, this is not my way; my principles are formed; I will never be one of those vile, old-fashioned Tories. I will starve first. I have been weak enough to keep all this from Sir John. You know what *his* views are. And now I see that there is a regular crash coming, and how am I to meet it?"

His head drooped, and he looked quite worn and dejected.

"May I go on and guess again?" she went

on, timidly. "There is another difficulty, too. These Palmers, whom you met abroad—there is some entanglement—"

He looked a little confused.

"My dear Mrs. Lepell, I may as well tell you everything 'out of the face,' as the Irish say. You guess wonderfully. Well, yes. There is something I *am* more or less—that is—what is the word?"

"Committed," Mrs. Lepell said, smiling; "that is what the worldly people would call it. There has been no time lost, I see. After all, it is a pity. Because these long engagements are so many weights and drawbacks, on a clever and brilliant young man, who has laid himself out to succeed with every advantage—it is hard enough, there is such competition; but disadvantages make it harder; still, a handsome and clever girl— But the thing now is, what is to be done? What did that clever Mrs. Palmer say?"

"Ah! exactly; and I just consulted them to see, you know. Miss Palmer was for the straightforward course, to go at once to Sir John. To tell

everything boldly, and say that my mind was made up, that I would never sacrifice my principles, and all that. Now, what do you say?"

Mrs. Lepell remained silent.

"Well," he repeated, "what do you say?"

"What do you think?" she said, smiling; "are you inclined to adopt *their* advice? It is the noblest and most chivalrous course."

"Ah! exactly; but——"

"But a very simple one. It is one about which there can have been no difficulty from the beginning. You and I, Mr. Severne, know very well, also, what will be the results of that course, which no doubt Miss Palmer, with her foreign education, did not see—and naturally did not see."

"No," said Severne, enthusiastically, "that is her charm. She is the most unworldly, unhexed, freshest creature this earth ever saw!"

"Well, then, I tell you," said Mrs. Lepell, bluntly, "if you go straight to Sir John with chivalry and plain-speaking, you must make up your mind to lose everything. This fine old

place, your future seat in the House, fortune, success, life, everything. After all, a fresh and charming girl, as unsophisticated as we may imagine, is a real compensation; but the first thing is, you must choose between the two."

"Then *what* would you recommend?" said Severne, uneasily.

"Well, at the risk of being called sophisticated and worldly, and wanting *freshness*, I would say, take a middle course. First, is there not a way of subscribing the Thirty-nine Articles, with a reserve and a half sense? You sign them all nominally, but with a meaning of your own——"

"Nothing can be more base," said Severne, starting up—"more dishonourable. You would not have me *surely*——"

"Sign Articles?—certainly not," she said, calmly. "Were you thinking of *that* as a resource? No; what I meant was, that as politics stretch now-a-days, and there are such colours and shadings, and gradations—such Liberal-Conservatives and Conservative-Liberals—I was thinking——"

“ All cloaks for dishonesty, every one of them ; so they are, as I live ! ”

“ And so long as I live I should never ask you to adopt such a course ! We only come back to this, however ; if you go chivalrously to Sir John, I think you see, with me, it will be ruin—utter ruin. Now, forgive me for speaking freely. I do not think you are called on to adopt such a chivalrous and dangerous course. There is no such hurry. We are not called on to abdicate all sense, and rush headlong on to destruction. We are allowed time to look about us. We do not live in the Middle Ages. You *are* not required to get up in the morning happy and full of hope, and go to bed that same night miserable and ruined. Would you be advised by me, a mere worldling, as you will call me, but one who has a sincere interest in your hopes, your welfare, and your success—in your natural ardour, and brilliancy, and enthusiasm ? Let me advise you, now. Let us consult together—gain time—temporising a little, for a few weeks ; and then see what is to be done. Suppose I speak to Sir John ? I am

rather a friend of his. There was some little use in 'The Short Way,' after all."

"My dear Mrs. Lepell," he said, warmly, "I think you have a great deal of sense and wisdom, which is *not* worldliness; and I see your views perfectly. And what is more, too, you have a great deal of forgiveness and good-nature, and are really heaping coals of fire on my head. Come now, let us draw our chairs together and have a regular council."

Before the sound of the castors of the chairs had died away they heard a rustle and looked up.

There was the glowing face—the flashing eye—looking down on them. There was a statuesque attitude, as of some indignant goddess; and there, on the lips, was a look of open scorn and indignation. Severne started up as if he had been rebuked.

"I have not heard anything," said Miss Palmer, "beyond a single word; but that tells me what sort of advice this is. I say again, Mr. Severne, the straight course is the best and the noblest, and that I conjure you to take. It will

be the best in the end. Have no secret scheming; I conjure you go straight to Sir John. Tell him your story and he will like you the better for it. You must—you must do nothing else, no matter who attempts to persuade you!"

Both looked at her with wonder—Severne, perhaps, with a little confusion.

"I declare," he said, at last; "I believe you are right. The straight course is the best always. Mrs. Lepell and I have been in council, and we were thinking that as Sir John is so hasty and excitable, though with as true a heart as ever Englishman had, that perhaps it might be better to wait. But, after all, if I know him at all, he would be more pleased by our going straight to him, and telling him all at once."

"Ah, I knew you would do what is right and noble," said the young girl, clasping her hands. "That dear Sir John will like and love you the better. Go, Severne; lose not a moment. He is in his study now. And I will answer for the result."

Severne started up. "It *does* seem like an inspiration," he said, eagerly. "I shall go at once. Mrs. Lepell, she is right, after all."

Mrs Lepell merely shrugged her shoulders. "I have no right to interfere; but I have seen a little of the world, and I, too, have my secret convictions. If you ask me, I must tell you, you are going to commit a mistake. Wait even until to-night. Nothing can be compromised by that."

"No, no!" said Severne. "Let us have it over; by lunch, we shall be all talking happily together, and have it off our minds. A thousand thanks, my dear Mrs. L., for your kind advice. I know you meant it ever so kindly; but I think little worldly tactics would fail here. Come, dear," he said.

As they left the room the young girl flashed back at Mrs. Lepell, who was standing with her hands resting on a chair, what seemed a look of triumph. Mrs. Lepell only smiled. When they were gone she said aloud to herself, "half an hour, and we shall see."

She waited there very patiently. Suddenly the door was opened and Lord John looked in.

An idea seemed to flash on her suddenly. "Lord John," she said, "will you tell me something—as a great favour? You know you are going away."

"Not yet, my dear," said his lordship, dropping into a chair. "Not just yet, my dear. My hour is not yet come. But now, what's this? What can I tell you, my dear, that *you don't know, eh*—you innocent, guileless, unworldly little thing?"

"I want you to tell me very much," she said, taking no notice of this compliment, "something about those new people—the Palmers. You know everything about every one, and I am sure there is a little history about them."

"And now what on earth are they to you, eh?" asked he. "Come!"

"Nothing in the world! what is any one to me, except my husband?" said she, looking down; "but shall I confess, Lord John, I don't quite like them?"

"I don't like 'em either. The young one's a stuck-up thing; and I should like to see her get a lesson."

"Oh, *you* could give her *that*," she said. "She shrank from you at breakfast. She is so ready with her tongue."

"Indeed I know 'em, as well as—that is, as I did—my old grandmother. There is not a man, woman, or child in the kingdom that I couldn't turn inside out if I chose! Bless you, I've seen the world. Mrs. P. had better keep quiet, and regulate her young cub, who, I think, *we* see is flying at good game. They won't be out of this, mark me, ma'am, for a month yet. I know their trick, bless you, and what's more, could put a spoke—ay, half a dozen spokes—in their two-penny-halfpenny wheels, ma'am."

Lord John had, indeed, come fresh from Mrs. Hardcastle, who had the best cherry brandy "on the face of God's earth." "Where is the whole pack now?" he asked.

"May I tell you a secret, Lord John?" she said, in a low voice. "*He*, Mr. Severne, is gone

to tell Sir John that he is a Whig, or a Radical, and that he can't——”

“ *What!* ” said Lord John, starting up, “ is the murder out at last? Has our friend to un-kennel his fox? Oh, I knew it would come to this—I knew it would, and I always said so. Why, there’ll be the most infernal Belzebubian row that this house has ever seen, even when old Cromwell and his Quakers came down here—that is, my dear, if you believe *that* lie. O Lord, Lord! ” and Lord John rubbed his hands with delight. “ I won’t go till I see it out. It’s worth staying for. My dear woman, there’ll be fun—fun, don’t you see? and I like a piece of fun. I declare I could just put my arms—ahem! —round that screen, I am so pleased. You are a great little woman, and I like you, I do indeed. There’s a pluck and game of your own about you; and a spice of the What’s-his-name in your eye——”

“ Now, really, Lord John, ” she said gravely, “ only that you’re going away——”

“ Fiddle-dee—on my grandmother’s face. (Ah,

we were all happy innocent children once; and eat our pudding with a sense of innocence—you know?) That won't make so much matter, for I won't lose sight of you, Mrs. L. Where are you in London, you smart, roundabout—ahem!—cushion?—this cushion, ma'am: ah, you won't catch me. Round it is, and no one can deny it." Mrs. Hardcastle's *liqueur* was mounting higher every moment. "Come, out with it, where are you to be? you and poor Shadrach upstairs, or Abednego—whatever was his name? It's no use hiding it; for, by the living thingamby, I'll unearth you. I have been looking for you the last half hour, to tell you all this—only that woman Hardcastle got me into her den there."

"I don't know whether I ought to," she said gravely; "but as I know it is of no use to hide anything from you, I must tell. Well, Mr. Lepell has taken a house—a small house—number 75, Brooke Street."

"Mr. Lepell and I—ha, ha! that's not so bad—always awake! knowing, knowing little—ahem! Well, I'll drop in very—very often, if you behave

—that is, mind, no forwardness—nothing to shock a mind of tender years, you know—*maxima debetur*, you know. Positively, if I hear a word likely to endanger my faith or morals, that moment I run out of the house."

Mrs. Lepell could not but laugh at this comic notion.

His lordship laughed too.

"Yes, I'll come often—very often. When *he's put to bed* I'll drop in, and won't we have our cup of tea together—No. 75—I won't forget, I declare. I am sorry to go off to-day, but I must. See here—perhaps, one of those evenings, when you are making a cup of tea for me at Brooke Street, I'll tell you about our friends; a story, ma'am, that will make that little figure of yours jump out of its arm-chair, eh? Egad, I must go and get all my traps together. I'll see you again, though." He went out, leaving Mrs. Lepell ruminating deeply. No one came for at least a quarter of an hour. Suddenly the door was opened, and Severne, pale, agitated, and miserable, strode in.

"It is all over," he said. "You were too right—God knows! Now, what is to be done?" He was very wild. "I can't stop now," he said. "It's all at an end—now, and for ever! There's been a dreadful business. *You were right in what you said*, but I am not ashamed of what I have done. It's all over now, and I shall only see you for a few hours more."

"Why—tell me, what is all this?" she said in alarm. "What has happened? Oh, I am so grieved."

"It is not your fault—quite the contrary—if I had listened to you—but I thought he was one of the fine old stock, that liked what they called 'manly candour' and hearty English straightforwardness. Ah!" said he, ruefully, "my manly candour has done for us, I am afraid. Still I am not sorry. There was but the one course for a man of honour."

"But something could be done," said Mrs. Lepell; "surely something. He is generous and good, though hasty, and that charming girl—"

He laughed. "The charming girl—and she is one—would be like a bit of scarlet cloth to him. He has just spoken to Mrs. Palmer in a way that we could not expect from him, a true country gentleman. He has forgotten his hospitality and politeness, I am afraid, and they are going away at once."

"This is all dreadful," said she, clasping her hands. "Who would have thought this?"

"Well you did," said Severne, with a forced laugh. "You saw further than the wise man. No matter. I have done for myself. But we must all get rubs at some time of our life. I am now free; to tell you the truth, that state of even partial subservience was odious to me. I can now breathe and stretch my arms."

He did draw a long breath, and affected to stretch his arms, but not with the enjoyment that he professed—that simple operation did not seem fraught with such exquisite pleasure, or worth the price that had been paid for it.

Mrs. Lepell was left in a fit of abstraction—was she thinking how this convulsion would affect

her?—when the door was hastily opened, and Sir John looked in.

His face was hot, and almost contorted. When he saw Mrs. Lepell alone there, he turned back and went out of the room, banging the door behind him. Then he found perhaps that he would have to walk round a long way, so he returned and came through once more. She saw him muttering, and his eyes fell on her with a fixed stare of unconsciousness.

“Sir John,” she said, in a soft voice.

He stopped short before her. “Do you want anything?” he said rudely. “Then ring the bell, ma’am. I have no time to talk. That fellow has destroyed me.—He has driven the blood up to my very head. A low, grovelling, mean-souled ostler—that’s what he is. He hasn’t a thought that’s fit for a gentleman. On my soul, I believe he wants to kill me. But I’ll take care he shan’t!”

She ran to him, for Sir John had dropped into a chair helplessly.

“Do you know what the scoundrel has done?

Do you know what he has been skulking through the house doing? It makes me ill to think of it. There is a strain across here, ma'am. It seems I have been fattening and pampering a low plebeian Radical all this time. A low, illegitimate, sneaking Whig, that would level us all down to the boors in the fields there, and cut up my land. Those are sweet pretty principles to have under my roof! But they shan't stay there an hour longer, not one of 'em—not a day longer. He shan't have a cut at my land in any way. He may go among the rabble if he likes, and stir them up to come and mob me and stone me—as I suppose he will! But out of this he packs. And on the top of all, a marriage, no less, with a creature that he has picked out of a French caffy or a bullyvar. My God Almighty," said he, starting up, " that all this should have come on me in a day! *Why*, they'll point at me all over the country. I'm disgraced—disgraced, ma'am—and, curse me!—I beg your pardon for the swearing before you—if I don't go down to my grave without forgiving it."

"But, sir," said the lady, "I am sure it can be explained; he may have been hasty."

"I don't care," said the baronet; "let him. He has chosen, and he may stay so. It's not that. It's the low, ungentlemanly, systematic hoodwinking and deception that has gone on for years. Shamming a good Tory, he and that soft mother of his: and all this time I have been pampering and petting a ruffian that will cut all our throats on some morning and divide our property. It's horrible—base and horrible—and infernal cruel and ungrateful too, though that's the least. For I was always kind and indulgent. But, thank God, I've found him out in time, and before I made my will too. I am glad of that. I'll set about it in the morning, and the lowest charity school shall have every stick in the place before it shall go to him, or near him;" and exhausted by this denunciation, Sir John sank again into a chair, and sat there staring wildly. "Now, not a word for him; I won't listen to it—not a word now," he said, starting up again and leaving the room.

Mrs. Lepell was aghast, and sat there long wondering at this mysterious change. Afar off she heard the series of doors "banging," as the angry lord of the house went his way to his study. Servants came by and looked in with gloom and doubt on their faces, for in a surprisingly short space of time it had spread through the house that there had been "a hawful blow up" between Sir John and his nephew. It seemed as though there had been a death in the house.

Never were there such gloomy hours.

Severne came back later, and found Mrs. Lepell in the same place.

"This is life," he said dismally. "However, I was quite prepared for all this. I knew it was coming, and was ready to go through the consequences. I am very glad it has come. It was a degrading position to be in, and it has been hanging over me like a weight. I am now free. Thank heaven, I can carry out my own principles, and carry out my promises, independent and unshackled. I shall work my own way and

my own fortunes at the Bar, or in any other opening."

"Would it not be better," said Mrs. Lepell gently, "without, of course, any sacrifice of principle—to temporise, not to be in quite such a hurry? Nothing is gained by haste—nothing is lost by delay. You might wait until to-morrow, or say you would consider the matter."

"And would not that be temporising and truckling, Mrs. Lepell?" he said. "No, no! I don't think you mean that. I cannot sacrifice my principles, even a hair's-breadth."

CHAPTER XVI.

BREAK UP.

LONG was that day recollected at Digby. Duncan, the serving-man, told what he had seen and heard to the little community—with some more, perhaps, which his instinct furnished him.

“Sir John be wus than I have ever known him in my life.”

This was at the lower ladies’ and gentlemen’s table, when they were dining at two o’clock. Duncan, Sir John’s “hown man,” the butler, and Mrs. Hardcastle, with another select menial or two, were taking that meal together.

“Markt my words, Mrs. ’Ardcastle, if something won’t bust on us before long. Severne’s been doin’ something that’s worked him. Markt my words”—this was a phrase which Mr. Duncan heard a Conservative Member—who was

auguring the downfall of England—use very often, and it seemed to him very “fine”—“Markt my here words, all this ’ill bust afore long, but it ’ll clear the hair—clear the hair” (another phrase also used by the Member). “He’s a packing at this moment,” went on Mr. Duncan, “not the ’eavy things, you know—they’d fill chests,—but merely the pus’nal necessaries—throwing a few indispensables into a portmanter. I know what all that means, Mrs. ’Ardcastle. As for Sir John, he’s a filing against the bars of his cage, in a hopeous condition. I pity him, I do. As for Severne, he’s aimerbel enough, but, as I said all along, wants ballus—wants ballus sadly.”

Mrs. Hardcastle, still discussing the crisis, thought darkly it was all along of the “pranker-ing” woman upstairs, who was scheming the whole house into mischief. “An artful, ob-skewer person, as no one knew where she come from, or where she’d go to, respectably.” She must say, must Mrs. Hardcastle, that she *were* surprised at Sir John taking in persons of *that*

sort, off the road, as it were, and she knew at the time—nay, had she not distinctly prophesied it the first day?—that no good would come of it. But here Mr. Duncan must “reerly” interpose. He could not coincide in that harsh view. He was a man of the world, was Duncan, and had travelled with the young Lord Tipton to a great capital called “Parse,” where—as Duncan often told—they had remained a fortnight at the “Hotel Mirreyboo,” in the “Plarse Vaughan-dum,” and he considered Mrs. Lepell to be a “fine woman,” on the French pattern, and “genteel” on the whole. To say the truth, our heroine, who had a surprising instinct in reading off the humours and prejudices of those about her, had correctly interpreted the feelings of that gentleman, and wishing no doubt to conciliate all his little offices in favour of the poor helpless invalid upstairs, had paid him special attention. The result was frequent discussions at table between the superior ladies and gentlemen downstairs, in which much female acerbity was displayed, and in which Mr. Duncan, as a

travelled man of the world, and confessing to a weakness for "fine women," was "constreened," as he called it, to range himself on the side of Mrs. Lepell.

He had, indeed, happily described the miserable state of things upstairs. It was indeed the longest day ever known at Digby; it seemed actually to trail by. Those who were in the house, when long after they looked back to these days, could only recall a weary fevered "day before execution," with a vision every now and then of a strained old man's face, with staring eyes, and flaming cheeks, which every now and again burst out upon them from some door, and withdrew again, after some frantic ravings. Mrs. Lepell saw many of these visions. It flashed out also, very unexpectedly, on the two strange ladies, who had arrived so recently. He was passing through the room, as usual, when his eye fell on them.

"What are you doing here, women?" he said, stopping short, and looking from one to the other. "Why aren't you with *him*—why don't

you give him some more of your *French* instructions—eh ? ”

The ladies looked frightened. “ I don’t understand, Sir John,” the elder answered, with dignity.

“ Don’t you, then ? ” answered he, in one of his bursts of fury ; “ I do then ! You have made up a nice game between ye, a nice plot—catching a boy out in a foreign country, when he’s sick and helpless ; not that I care one d—— ” and Sir John caught himself in time ; “ you’re welcome to him now, ma’am—the whole right and title of him, and can take him with you when and where you like. The French game hasn’t quite answered, you see.”

“ Mamma,” said the young girl, rising, “ I think Sir John Digby forgets—and is doing us great injustice. Let us go away.”

Sir John tried hard to sneer.

“ O, very good—very good, and very cool. More of the French ! I don’t forget. Of course I am a boor, and you or any of *his* friends can tell me anything. I don’t pro-

fess to command words, ma'am. I have always been accustomed to speak plainly; and if I am blunt, I have provocation for it. It's a shame—a crying, infernal shame, and I tell you so plainly—interfering in families in your French Jesuitical way, for it is interfering. If you only knew how I have looked to, and built on this low fellow to do something for the family, and for the country, which is going to ruin—and it may now, as soon as it likes, for it is not worth saving—I say, if you only knew—but you *did* know, ma'am—what I had laid out for this fellow; a seat ready for him to walk into; a family that was proud to have him, not for *his* sake—don't think so—but for mine, ma'am; that would have made him a gentleman, which he's not (and he may go to the poorhouse if he likes), and if you knew what Lord Buryshaft said to me—and he'll be in the Government by-and-by. Why, we could have had a PEERAGE, ma'am; and I had the title ready settled on, and all; and *you* come here—*you* and your—. Why, it's enough to drive a man stark staring out of his

wits. What d'ye mean by it? What, in the devil's name," went on the poor Baronet, now very wildly indeed, and losing all restraint, "brought you here on that infernal night? Did I do you any injury in all my life—did I, I say?"

"Sir John Digby," said the lady, with great dignity, "I can make great allowance for your feelings. I will say nothing of the way you have spoken to us—scarcely becoming an English gentleman, or suitable to ladies from any country, *even* France. When you are cooler you will do us justice, and find that we have nothing to do with this unfortunate business. Mr. Severne is a free agent. He is able to judge for himself."

"I don't believe it, ma'am," said Sir John, in a wild fury. "I don't care to mince words with *you*. It's all folly to be going on with politeness and such stuff. You put him up to it—set him up to it—you know you did."

"I say again," said Mrs. Palmer, "I can make all allowances and pass this by; but I

repeat, you do us injustice. You impute to us behaviour of which neither I nor my daughter are conscious. We did what we could, in a little way, for Mr. Severne. Of course, I make nothing of *that*—it was what any Christian ought to have done. It was *he* who asked us here, who *forced* us here. He assured us of a kind and a polite welcome.”

“ Oh, of course,” said Sir John, with eyes wandering from one to the other. “ And you received it, ma’am, I hope, eh? This is an English gentleman’s house, ma’am; and it’s owner knows how to treat ladies and gentlemen, and you might have stayed here on and on and on again, until your dying day, and done as you liked. But when I caught you tampering and plotting with d——d low French arts, stirring *him* up——”

“ I repeat,” said Mrs. Palmer, haughtily, “ we did nothing of the kind, neither I nor my daughter.”

“ Neither you nor your daughter, ma’am,” repeated Sir John, with a rueful sneer. “ Of

course not. I'll believe that of her, of course."

"I did, mamma," said the young girl, with her eyes upon the ground. "I confess it openly. I advised him to the manly, honourable course, not to sacrifice his principles or the happiness of his life to interest or money."

"You hear her," almost shouted Sir John. "This is infernal impudence! She boasts and brags of it!" He stamped with rage. "It's a conspiracy—a low Jesuit conspiracy! Go away, go along! Out of my sight! Don't come near me. Don't let me see you. Infernal brazen effrontery! I'm in a nice way," he added piteously. "They own it! A nice gang I've let in on myself. God help me! But go now, both of you. Pack—without an hour's delay, or the servants shall——"

"Our things *are* ready," said Mrs. Palmer, calmly, "and the chaise has been ordered an hour ago. We entered this house on *your* invitation, and we leave it of our own motion, after a day or

so's hospitality. The obligation is not *very* great."

He could hardly speak; but pointed to the door.

Again Mr. Duncan, much excited, brought down news to the superior sitting-room below of every stage of the business.

"There's a fly ordered from the Lion," he said, "for the French ones. They have got their *kongee*," said Mr. Duncan, pleasantly. In due time the "fly" came, and he was at his duties, which he discharged respectfully; but came down to the saloon below full of warm encomiums, as to their being "ladies," and that he knew it from the first, and was now sorry that they had got their *kongee*.

By-and-by came another departure: very pale and very agitated, Severne came down. *His* packing had not taken long; yet he had on a fine Roman manner, and a bearing of pride and excitement. Mrs. Severne, whom Sir John had unreasonably included in his condemnation, was going away also. She was quite overwhelmed

by this sudden turn, for her whole heart was in the advancement of her son, which up to that morning she had looked on as securely and as finally settled as though he had been born heir to all the estate and title of Digby. She fitted about the house quite helpless, not able to speak, or make any effort to avert what was coming on them.

“ We are all ready now,” said Severne to Mrs. Lepell, “ to be ejected. Who would have thought it would have come to this yesterday? Not that I care so much. I am a free man now, and *can stretch my arms*” (this was to be his favourite idea). “ The slavery was getting intolerable. Though it *is* a little mortifying to be drummed out—eh?—and before these people below, who I suppose know all about it—eh? They have a wonderful instinct these creatures—eh? ” He put these questions in a restless way. “ What a world it is! ” he went on, impatiently; “ to think of our being so pleasant and happy yesterday, and all turned upside down now. Not, mind, that I regret it a moment;

for to be a man you must be free—have your own responsibility. I can breathe and stretch out my arms now, which I could not do before. Ah ! but the problem now is, how are we to keep those arms strong and healthy ? *I* really don't see the way at this moment ; and these poor Palmers miles away I suppose by this."

She gave a little stamp. " *I never* can forgive them," she said, impatiently. " Now they are gone, I can speak of them freely. *They* brought all this mischief about. *They* hurried on things, when a little time would have saved everything —cold, unfeeling, selfish foreigners."

" No, no," said Severne, " I think not. They meant well."

" Ah, yes," said she, still impatiently, " that is *your* generosity. But the fact remains behind—meaning well or ill, *they have destroyed you*. I can never think of them with patience. We had a charming house here—we were all so happy, and getting to be so happy ; we were beginning to know each other—to like each other ; the days were running by so charmingly. *That* night

when we had our little battle was one of the happiest I ever knew. A charming party. To look back, it seems like fairy-land. And yet on that night *they* come, and destroy all. They plant themselves—this woman and her daughter—in our happy little community, like two Upas trees, and destroy all."

Severne was silent, and looked ruefully on the ground. This picture seemed to him a little faithful. For a moment he did not speak, when the door suddenly opened. They started. The inflamed wild face of Sir John looked in. It saw who was there, and was withdrawn.

"Poor, poor Sir John," said Severne, bitterly, "it goes to my heart—his look shocks me. If I go to him and say something—I will," he added, starting up.

Mrs. Lepell caught his arm. "No," she said, "be advised by me. Leave it to time—to a little time. This is a very bad moment."

"You are wrong. I can see he is suffering. Yes, it is an inspiration. He likes me in his heart. He cannot snap asunder the ties of years

in *that* rude and summary way. Yes, this is the moment."

"No, no," said she yet more eagerly. "You will ruin all. Leave it to your friends who stay after you. I conjure you, do this."

Again the door opened, and Sir John stamped in.

"This is my own house, you will leave me some corner of it?" he said. "I am not to be skulking from my own rooms because other people choose to stay. It is not quite come to *that* as yet."

With an uncontrollable impulse Severne, seeing the old face worn and inflamed, ran to him and took his arm.

"Dear, dear sir," he said, "this is all cruel. We must not leave each other in this way. It has been a mistake, all through. I love you, and always have loved you, and I know in your heart you still like me with all my follies; and I am sure everything can be explained and arranged, and if you will only bear with me for a little, and

make allowance, we need not push matters to——”

Sir John looked at him for a moment, speechless, then dashed away Severne's hand.

“ Why d—n your impudence and your infernal airs ! What do you speak to me for, sir ? ‘ You need not push matters.’ Needn’t you. Curse your heart, what d’ye mean ? How dare you talk to me that way, with your free-and-easy airs ! Get out of this—out of my house, where you have feasted, and fattened, and been made too much of, you ungrateful, low, beggarly, ill-conditioned, unfeeling, damned——. I beg your pardon, ma’am, I do indeed,” added poor Sir John, his face working. “ I forget my manners, but I am forgetting everything with this mean, whining fellow, that you see would now be under my feet to get back to his place—*his place*, ma’am, for he has been living on *me* all this time. You *have*, my genteel fellow. He might have been in the street, but for me. Yes, you would, you low, mean plebeian, you, that—mark my words—will die in a ditch yet ! What

d'ye stay here for, sir, in my house? Didn't I tell you to take yourself off? Go—quick; you poison the air! I want no Jacobins or levellers here, and you *were* one all this time," added Sir John, speaking with a slow bitterness, "you sneaking — deceitful — ungentlemanly — fellow. Look here—look at this. I am glad you are not gone, for I wanted you to see this. And you look too, ma'am, and be witness—you know what this is—and you, too, ma'am —look ! look !" And with great trembling and tugging he got out a large parchment bundle, thick, and tied up with green ribbon, and looking like a deed. "It is not long ago," he went on, "since this was done. It took a very long time—and cost a good deal too—but I shan't be long getting rid of it. There—there—there—that settles *that*, Mr. Severne !" And with a knife which was on the table he cut and hewed the bundle of parchment across again and again, as if it was a piece of wood, until it lay on the ground in ribbons. These he gathered up with fingers that trembled, and thrust into

the fire. Then looked at Severne with a sort of triumph.

Severne stood there, pale and agitated too. He knew perfectly what this meant. For this destruction seemed to be a sort of final and irrevocable ceremony, which brought home to him—never with so much force until that moment—the palpable fact of his disgrace. At that moment he felt that it was all over; and Sir John, standing before him, and looking at him, saw that. There was triumph in his eye.

“ You haven’t thrust me into my coffin yet,” he said, “ you and your levelling gang. And you and they may come as soon as you like *now*. It’ll not do you much good.”

Severne could say nothing. He was quite crushed.

“ Now begin to whine:—‘ Now—now—don’t go on this way.’ How *dare* you! Curse your impudence! Not a shilling—not twopence-half-penny, sir ! ” went on Sir John; “ and you little know what I had done for you in that—that thing. Ah ! you ungrateful, low Jacobite—Ja-

cobin!—you had always the bad drop in you—and they told me so, and I didn't believe 'em."

Mrs. Lepell went forward to him suppliantly.

"Oh, Sir John, Sir John," she said, "this is all dreadful—it is terrible, that things should have come to this."

"And who brought them to this?" said he, turning sharply on her. "It's my own, thank God, every stick and stone in this place; and I bless my stars that I have lived to keep him out of it. What are you staying for, sir? I thought you had some pride in you still. *I* wouldn't wait to be turned out of a house. I suppose the company you keep have taken that out of you."

Severne coloured, but said nothing. He turned to go. He was quite overwhelmed, speechless, crushed—by the savage vindictiveness of the other. Sir John looked after him with a sort of triumph. At that moment entered Duncan, who announced, with all the respect due to dignity in adversity—

"Things is all in, sir."

Severne bowed to Sir John, and turned to go.

Mrs. Lepell ran to him at the door, and whispered—

“Keep up hope; you leave a friend behind who will work for you.”

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR JOHN GOES HOME.

THE house was now all but deserted. The Lepells alone remained; and they had fixed to go next morning. Mr. Lepell was infinitely better, though he did not come down.

What remained of the day was oppressive. Sir John had again retired into his den, and was not to be seen. The air seemed charged with gloom, as though it were the day before the funeral; and yet it cannot be said that one in so awkward a position as the guest spent it sorrowfully or found it dull. She went out to get some fresh air in the grounds, in the unrivalled old English gardens, and got a bit of bread from Mr. Duncan "to feed the fish." Indeed that gentleman insisted on carrying it out

himself on a plate, and spoke very feelingly and confidentially of the late events.

It was most dishasterous, he said, and one of the most awkerd countertongs that had ever occurred. Observe, he hadn't a word to say against Mr. Severne, who had always behaved to him pussonally in a gentlemanly and feelin' manner ; and a more impartial witness might say that never had Severne been more "like a gentleman" than at his leave taking. "The whole thing was most peenful," Mr. Duncan added, "to any looker on with feelings." He wouldn't like to pass through it again : and he feared looking Mrs. Lepell in the face ; "the britch was now all past accommodation." Mrs. Lepell feared so too. These jars in families, Mr. Duncan thought, were always so painful. However, it would do Sir John good ; he was always better for "a fill-up." Mrs. Lepell was not a-goin' too ? "I hope we'ent a-goin' to lose *you*, ma'am ?" went on Mr. Duncan, with a gallant smile. "We should look back to this 'ere unfortunet business, with a double vexation,

if it were to deprive us of *hall* of our guests. I 'ope not."

Our Mrs. Lepell answered this kind wish with much good humour, and said, with a sigh—

"I grieve to say we have to go to-morrow morning, Mr. Duncan. I am sorry for it, we have been very pleasant here; and to go away at such a moment in such confusion is very bad."

"'Tis fearful," said Mr. Duncan, reflectively. "But you must come to us again, Mrs. Lepell. Sir John 'ill be lookin' out for you one of these mornin's. We shall miss you, indeed. And I assure you, speaking from my 'art now, that night when you did the ch'ardes"—did Mr. Duncan mean the little plays they had given?—"it was, rerly now, a thing to look back to; it were indeed. And you give to him so well—rerly."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Duncan. I am very glad you were pleased. I assure you I value your praise highly. I am afraid I must go in now;" which she did.

In the drawing-room belowstairs Mr. Duncan told the ladies and gentlemen of his own circle, with unconcealed exhilaration and, it is to be feared, not a too strict adherence to the truth, that "she'd asked him out into the garden. Fine woman; rerly, now; but for'ard—devilish for'ard."

The dinner that day was a very odd spectacle, only Sir John and Mrs. Lepell partaking of it. Sir John came down with the flushed cheeks and the troubled eyes searching suspiciously round the room, as if he were going to say—"Where the devil have you hid him? If he's skulking here——"

Mr. Duncan and the under-footman, the coachman and the boy, all waited with a superabundant pomp of attendance, just as usual when eighteen or twenty sat down. There was a delicacy, and almost tender, though suppressed gallantry, in the manner of Mr. Duncan towards the lady; he waited on her himself, "pussonally" and exclusively; and once when the coachman, heavy and rustic in his motions, had changed

Mrs. Lepell's plate, in what he believed to be the natural round of his duties, Mr. Duncan reproved him outside the door, with much heat, wishing to know what he meant by thrusting "hisself on ladies, like a beast, a smellin' o' 'osses, as he was;" a remark that brought on a very painful scene downstairs, between the two gentlemen.

Sir John ate nothing, and scarcely spoke. Mrs. Lepell spoke a good deal, and with great art contrived to keep up a conversation in which she only was the speaker. Neither did she make little of the delicacies which Mr. Duncan took care to offer to her, for she had always a good appetite, and now merely seemed bound, as she kept up the conversation unassisted, to keep up also the meal itself, unassisted.

It was done at last, and she had fluttered away to the drawing-room, carrying out the fiction of "leaving the gentlemen to their wine." Leaving poor Sir John to his wine indeed! He sat there long, with the same glassful before him that he had filled when the cloth was taken away, and with his eyes fixed on the wainscot. He still sat

on until very late, when, with a start, he rose up and stamped away to his study, with his now usual accompaniment of loud banging doors. Mr. Duncan finished, or rather began, the glass, sitting down in his master's chair to sip it. He accompanied it with a toast—need we say it was to “a fine woman!”

Mrs. Lepell sat in the drawing-room, a little restless. What could she be waiting or, for expecting—not surely what her generous female friends would have called “an old beau?” Towards ten, Sir John, restless also, came in with the same uneasy look in his eye. “I don’t like being alone,” he said, “though, indeed, I must now accustom myself to that nice pass they have brought me to! Now that we have a fine clear house, thank God! do you know, I feel the air clearer.”

“Sit near the fire, Sir John,” said Mrs. Lepell, in a kind and cozy manner; “draw in your chair; it’s a very cold night.”

“I don’t find it so,” said he, “they’ve warmed me enough for to-day. Do you know what I

have been doing in the study—writing an Address."

"An address!" repeated she.

"Yes; an address. Don't you know what that is?—it's not seven heads!—Yes, an address to the electors. I must drag my old bones to the hustings. It's a duty I owe to the poor country, and to the county. I'll stop the leak, and take care they don't hand it over to some low scoundrel that will come and chop up our estates. That's part of the game, ma'am. I daresay it will kill me with all the fuss and noise; but, after all, it's in a good cause." He paused and went on—"That's a nice spectacle at my time of life! I haven't strength for it, but I'll go through with it if I drop down on the boards before them. I won't let this old country be disgraced; and I've money enough, too, to fight the battle. No weavers, or tailors, or spinners, shall get in here. At my time of life, with my poor old limbs, to be going through all this worry! It's infernal cruel—it's cruel—I'll never get through it."

It was hard not to pity this ancient Con-

servative of the Old Guard. Mrs. Lepell, really moved, drew over softly, and took his hand.

“Now, Sir John,” she said, bluntly, “I’m not going to mind what you say a bit. But I tell you this one thing, scold me and abuse me as you like, the whole of this, I am afraid, is a little your own fault.”

“My fault, ma’am?” said Sir John, drawing away his hand—“my fault, ma’am?”

“Yes, your fault, Sir John,” she went on; “you have been too hasty in all this. I think so, indeed, and that’s my opinion, and I say it out, as I am going away to-morrow; so I have no object, you see.” (Mrs. Lepell did not see there was some bad logic here.) “You have been *very* hurried in this business—and I have been thinking it over all the night—and a little harsh.”

“Why, ma’am,” said Sir John, getting warm, “what the —” suddenly he stopped.

“Well, you know how young he is—a mere boy—that has neither sense nor experience.”

“Indeed he has not, nor grace either—never was a truer word.”

“Men of that age,” she went on hurriedly, and pleading very hard, “rarely know their own minds—they know nothing of the world—nothing absolutely. They are obstinate, and the more you reason with them the more you fix their pride.”

“Well, ma'am,” said Sir John, with a sort of suspicious surprise, “and what's all this coming to? What the devil are you driving at now? What trick is in the wind? I tell you what, Mrs. —”

“Sir John,” said Mrs. Lepell, rising with great dignity, “I thought you belonged to the old *chivalrous* school, that set an example to our days. I can make every allowance for your trials; but still I think I owe something to myself, for you have been kind to me and I feel kind to you, and that it is better for me to—go to bed.”

Sir John was confused.

“Why do you take me up so, ma'am? I can't

speak by the card. Haven't I reason to be sweet tempered to-day, and you can make no allowance? But who does for an old man like me, God help us! I didn't mean—I——”

“Not a word, dear Sir John,” she said, with delight, “not a syllable more. It was, indeed, I—I am touchy, and only meant to say that I thought you were a little hurried; that if you had given Mr. Severne a little time he would have reflected—seen what he was losing, and decided wisely. Now his pride is touched.”

“And let it be,” said Sir John, vindictively. “But what did I do? Why d'ye say I did it? Didn't he go away himself? Did I turn him out? Who asked him to go? God knows he might have stayed here as long as he liked, or if he wanted time to think, of course, anything in reason. Though would you have me take in a pair of beggars, like that woman and her child, off the street—eh, ma'am?—is that what you are at? ”

“They!” said Mrs. Lepell, with great contempt. “I'd have had them taken by the shoul-

ders the first night they entered this house, and packed back into their chaise again. They were common people out of the street. I said that openly, and made no secret of it. It was the most foolish, mad idea in the world. You were quite right Sir John, to send them out—*pack them out.*”

“I was—I know I was,” said he. “I’m glad I did it, too.”

“I know a little of human nature,” went on Mrs. Lepell, a little mysteriously. “The sight of them will always be associated with the loss of all his hopes and prospects. In a week he will be disgusted with *her*. Don’t you see? Therefore I say, Sir John, don’t—don’t be hasty. Don’t be hard on an unfortunate, foolish youth, who is no wiser than others of his age.”

Sir John paused. There was something in this. Suddenly he burst out again :

“It’s not that, ma’am. As for marrying, I should not so much mind *that* if he got a virtuous well-conducted young woman; and, of course, with good, *sound* connections; but it’s not *that*.

Was I to put up with a damned pestilential Radical under my—— to have a fellow breathing his vile doctrines under my roof, corrupting my servants, and teaching them to cut our throats? Never—never, ma'am; I won't have it—never!"

"There again, you are wrong, too, dear Sir John," said she, firmly, "and I take the liberty of telling you so. All young men are that way *at first*. Was not the great Mr. Pitt so, Sir John, when he was a young man?" (where did Mrs. Lepell learn *that* bit of history?) "So was—was Eldon? and so was"—(she could not recall any more instances, and put it generally)—"so were hundreds more. It would have worn off, Sir John. These are mere childish fancies, and should be treated like a child's. You are a man of the world, Sir John, and have met all sorts of men. I declare I am a little angry with you, though I know I shall make you angry with me for saying so, for the county has lost a capital candidate, and a capital marriage, which would have kept the place and the property."

Sir John looked down. This view had not struck him.

“That is all very well. How am I to know these things,” he said; “I only take fellows as I find ‘em. I am too old to begin arguing with, and waiting on boys. Though it does break my heart to think of the old place, that I know and recollect these sixty-five years, every day of it, being broken and going to rack and ruin. For I won’t let the *other* Digbys in—no, I’m not come to *that*. Fine fashionable London people, ma’am, that would pull down every stick of these old rooms and build a plaster villa.”

“Ah, do think it over again, Sir John—night brings counsel, you know. Instead of misery you will have happiness once more. Indeed I am principally thinking of *you*, Sir John, and of the certain unhappiness that will come into this dear house. I speak disinterestedly, for we shall be far away to-morrow, and may never see you again, Sir John, or—talk over ‘The Short Way.’”

Something like a rueful smile came to Sir John's face.

"Indeed, no, ma'am, you must not leave us yet. I am greatly obliged to you, for this sort of talk is a comfort to me. Of course I can be just and make allowance, ma'am, and if the fellow is sincerely sorry, and recants his errors—fully, ma'am, mind, and no casuistical reserve, ma'am—and comes back and says he will do everything, why, why——"

"Thank you, thank you, Sir John," she cried. "How kind, how generous, how forgiving. O this, indeed, is noble. But then, Sir John—ah ! think of what you did to-day so very hastily. Stern justice, certainly, which I fear can't be recalled."

"Ah!" said Sir John, with satisfaction. "He felt *that*. I can do what I like with my own still. He saw that. It had a good effect on him, ma'am, I think. He cowered under it. He thought he had some poor fogie to do with. It went home. Though as for that matter, between you and me, it doesn't make so much difference."

Mrs. Lepell looked up in astonishment.

“No difference, Sir John?”

“Why, not exactly,” he said. “The fact is—I just thought of it—I have another in that drawer much to the same tune, ma’am. There were some legacies which I wished to alter, and so I had another made—bran new. You’re a sensible woman, ma’am, and I admire you. I do, indeed. There’s a good deal of what’s rational in what you say. There’s no such violent hurry after all. It’s not life and death, eh, ma’am? The gallows isn’t waiting for us all to-morrow. We are not obliged to make up our minds in a second?”

“Exactly, Sir John,” said she, humbly, “you put it in the right view. There is no such great hurry. He can be punished—cut off, as he deserves to be, a week or a fortnight hence all the same.”

“So he can,” said Sir John, moodily. “Of course I don’t want to be unjust to any man, woman, or child. God knows we all want time for repentance—every one of us, ma’am. And

there is little enough allowed to us. I don't want to be harsh with him. Let him make submission to me—if he likes. Let him fix any reasonable time he pleases to make up his mind in, and I am content. I am a gentleman—the old school they call it, ha!—and don't want to take any one short, and I shall die a gentleman, I hope. They may call us—as the fashion now seems to be—stupid and mule-headed—nice and pretty language that, ma'am; but we're not ashamed to do the right thing, and the gentlemanly thing; pay our way, ma'am, which of course may be mule-headed and all that. Well, now—after all this—I'll go to bed, now, for to tell you the truth, I have gone through a great deal to-day; my head feels very weary, and I shall be glad of a good sleep."

"Good-night, then, Sir John," she said, taking his hand, warmly; "and you are not angry with me—poor me—for speaking so freely, and on a matter I had no business with?"

"Not at all, not at all, ma'am," said he shortly. "Good-night." Then he went to the door. He

came again, however, and said very warmly. "No, but I am *obliged* to you. I am, indeed. Do you know I have been dreading this going to bed all day, and now I don't mind it at all. I feel lighter about the heart. For you know it was a miserable thing to look forward to—spending the rest of my old days alone and deserted. And with all my faults, my dear, I don't deserve it. I don't think I do. Though I have my sins and faults, I shall be very glad, indeed, if the foolish lad comes back, and he *shall* have every allowance. Of course I don't want him to be with my Lord Eldon and the like, for of course the times have changed a little, and we must go a little with them. But I am obliged to you. I am indeed, madam, and you mustn't leave us just yet. And I assure you, you have given me a great deal of comfort to-night."

Then the figure of the old Baronet passed out. Mr. Duncan was waiting to light his candle for him. Mrs. Lepell was left behind in the library. She stayed there a long time by the fire; and Mr. Duncan, who came in on pretext of looking

after the "winders," observed a smile of great pleasure on her face. At first he naturally put that down to his own presence, and made a light and pleasant remark, in reference to the relation between them, but Mrs. Lepell answered very abstractedly. She was thinking of other matters, and, utterly unconscious of his presence, went over to the writing-table and began a letter. By this proceeding she fell considerably in the affections of that officer. She was a "wurldlin,'" he feared. The letter was to Severne, no doubt to tell him of the joyful news, and kind office she had done for him. She may have been a "wurldlin,'" but still she found pleasure in this task. It was carefully written, and she took some time over it. By the time she rose to go to bed it was nearly one o'clock.

Somehow she also had found it a weary day. Like Sir John, agitation of any sort wearied her bodily frame. So she lay down to rest very pleasantly, perhaps saying her prayers, and taking credit in the daily account for the Samaritan office of reconciling a good but "mule-

headed" old gentleman, and a "fine young man," perhaps as "mule-headed" in his particular way: and musing on these events, she went off to sleep, and from sleep to dreams the most tranquil and complacent in the world. Perhaps she was building up a whole city of castles on this foundation, and most naturally too. To a young married woman, just launched in London, with an invalid husband, what an advantage in a young man of fortune, with ancestral honours, and reasonably bound to her by all the ties of honour and gratitude! Such a young man, well favoured, brilliant, and clever, would soon enter on a brilliant course, "cut his bright way through" into the "first circles"—Oh! those gorgeous "first circles"—and where he led he surely could put out a kindly hand to show *her* the way; and perhaps then she would be on a level with the fine ladies who might have hitherto been a little *too* fine; perhaps then she would be seen at the "best houses," "taken up" by a dowager of rank, who would take her out, a charming, good, and pliant old dame, with whom

she could go upstairs in the ball, whose name she would hear announced, and her own after it, shouted from menial to menial, shouted again and again, so frantically, so loud that——

She had started up in bed, for she did hear her own name called again and again, through the door, while some one knocked violently. It flashed on her at once the house was on fire, and with a bound she was on the ground. It was Mr. Duncan's voice that she heard through the door. "O git up, ma'am," he said, "and tell us what we *are* to do. Poor Sir John, Mrs. Lepell, ma'am——"

Mrs. Lepell's instinct helped her to the conclusion at once, there was no fire. "Wait," she cried. "Mr. Duncan, I shall be ready in a moment," and with surprising rapidity, had hurried on a dress. In a moment she opened the door.

"Is he very ill," she asked; "have you sent for a doctor?"

"A man a-'orseback have gone off. I sent him myself, but I fear indeed, Mrs. Lepell, ma'am—" and Mr. Duncan shook his head.

“Goodness!” cried she, in real alarm. “What does all this mean? Let me go to him,” and she set off hurriedly along the corridors and passages which led to Sir John’s room. But Mr. Duncan was up with her in a moment, and in the hall placed himself before her.

“No, ma’am—Mrs. Lepell,” he said, “it’s better not for *you*—indeed no. I were in there myself; and I fear that the doctor—O, ma’am, Mrs. Lepell,” added Mr. Duncan, with some genuine feeling, “he was a very good gentleman, and kind to us all. I wish—I wish, ma’am, he had not been quite so ‘short’ with Mr. ‘Arold.’”

Mrs. Lepell stopped. She had a positive distaste, as indeed she often admitted, to “painful scenes.” Sir John ill indeed—but dying—or dead—or in that mysterious, doubtful condition in which Duncan had shadowed him forth, she could not endure *that*. It was not more than half-past three; a light was burning here and there, for it was just the same as the dead of night. A herd of frightened women, whom the news had roused, half-dressed, flitted about,

or gathered near the fatal chamber. It was whispered that the coachman, Wilkins, "was with Sir John"—that is to say, in the room with the living spirit that was Sir John Digby, or the earthly remnant which only deserved the title from courtesy.

It was very cold, and freezing hard outside. It seemed like the middle of the night, as indeed it was to all intents and purposes. Into the cold library, where the fire had long since smouldered out, Mrs. Lepell withdrew, and wrapping a black shawl about her, over her white dress, sat down in an arm-chair to wait for news. A single candle lit the room. She felt both sick and cold; for this being roused in the night "upsets" many. The others flitted about the house; the white crowd gathered upon the stairs and passages, yet no one had courage to resolve all doubts by going in to see the coachman who was with Sir John. They all carried out the sham—the fiction of clinging to the hope of the doctor coming. Ah! poor Sir John, how many hundred thousand fanciful miles is he away by

this time; no earthly doctor, even though he be flogging his smart horse along, and is at the gate, can ever overtake him now. He is long since at his journey's end, and knows secrets which neither Tory nor “vile Radical” can divine.

Mr. Duncan told the story very often and to several audiences during these moments of suspense. He had woke up; he could not say why or wherefore—but then he was wakening and wakening, and then he heard Sir John's bell agoin' so, and agoin'. Then, as by some sort of “instink,” he knew that something was wrong, and leaped up. In after life, and in other “services,” he told the story very often, though he added another remarkable particular—that it was “a woice” that called suddenly and roused him.

But another sound was now heard—sounds of wheels were now heard through the night, and Mr. Duncan ran out to the hall, shading a candle with his hand. There was the doctor's gig, and the doctor himself, who had so cheerfully dined at Digby not many nights before, and who, going

home that night, had vainly prophesied to Mrs. Doctor that "old Sir John was good for ten years to come." Mr. Duncan led him away without a word to the chamber of—to Sir John's—and from thence he came out in two minutes to the crowd of women, and the men from within and without, and from even the farm, a mile and a half off; for news of this sort travels by some enchantment; and he said to them in a low voice—

" My good people, I can do nothing here. We have all lost a dear, good, kind friend!"

END OF VOL I.

